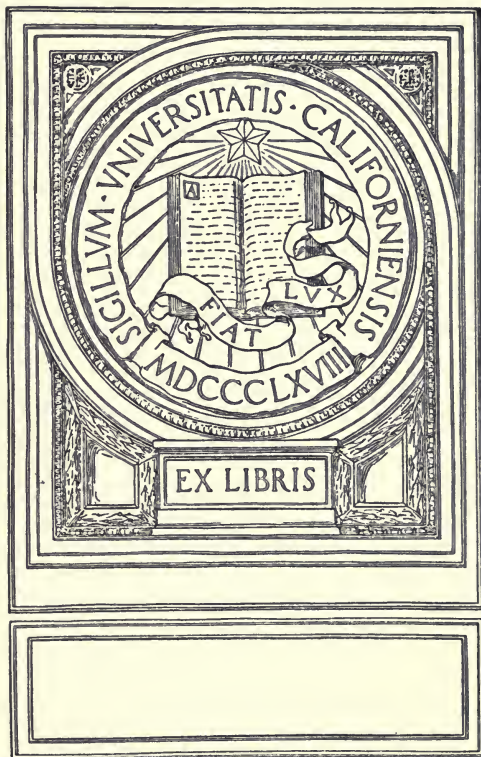






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THE KEY OF THE FIELDS
AND
BOLDERO



THE
KEY OF THE FIELDS
AND
BOLDERO

BY
HENRY MILNER RIDEOUT
Author of "WHITE TIGER," "THE FAR CRY," ETC.



UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA

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BOLDERO

CHAPTERS I TO XIV



THE KEY OF THE FIELDS

THE KEY OF THE FIELDS

CHAPTER I

YOUNG BLOOD AND OLD TRICKS

AFTERNOON drowsiness, early spring warmth, covered the old stone ramparts of Aigues-Mortes. Through heavy embrasures from which long-forgotten sentinels had watched Saint Louis and his Crusaders marching to their fleet, the sunshine now cast broad stripes and wedges of light over a deserted platform. In one of the brightest of these, under a turret, Jackdabos sat cross-legged, refitting a block of stone into the floor. A big brindle cur, his friend Puig's dog, lay snoring beside him. The young man's trowel made the only other sound, as it clinked on the aged stone, or scraped fresh mortar neatly into the surrounding crack.

"There!" sighed Jackdabos, when he had made all smooth round the block. "Now let us put our seal on this work."

What he had been doing, why he should have pried that particular loose stone out of place, looked under it, and put it back, one cannot say. Jackdabos himself could hardly have told. He was born to pry and to search, without knowing just what his fancies meant.

“How shall I write it?” he mused, taking out from his rusty brown velveteen clothes a carpenter’s pencil. “Let me think.”

Thinking came lightly to this young man. He smiled, and flourished his carpenter’s pencil, composing imaginary words on the sunlight above the smooth edges of the mortar. As he sat there cross-legged, his shining black eyes ready to catch an idea, he seemed the living brother of that Egyptian scribe in the Louvre, who waits forever, so intent and knowing, to write down somebody’s next word, foreseen but not yet spoken. Jackdabos had the same clear, elfin shrewdness in his brown face, the same upward quirk of the lips, the same alert, compact body. There, however, the resemblance ended; for he was no terracotta statue, but a youngster of flesh and blood—lean flesh and hot blood—who could do anything with his quick little hands except manage a pen.

“*Et zou!*” he muttered, and wrote on the mortar. First he wrote in modern Greek. It proved a rather illiterate performance. Jackdabos knew that much, and frowned.

"Pass up the Greek!" said he, and erased it.

Again he wrote, this time in English.

"My trowell is the scourage of god, where shee goes, nobody . . ."

Once more he paused, frowned, and erased the words.

"Pass up the English!"

He sat staring down over the bare inner edge of the ramparts, letting his thoughts rove across the sleepy, encircled town, the huddling pattern of Aigues-Mortes, a dull red-and-chestnut mosaic in tiled roofs. Then he gripped his carpenter's pencil afresh, bent down, and carefully printed on the mortar:

"Ma truelle est le fléau de Dieu; où elle est passée, l'herbe ne pousse jamais."

He pored fondly over this inscription.

"Ah, magnificent!" he cried. "They will understand that!"

Throwing down the pencil, he clapped his hands. Puig's brindle dog woke at the noise, yawned, stretched, and gazed with bleary eyes along the ramparts.

"It is not without magnificence, my child?" said Jackdabos.

The dog did not answer, even by a look.

"Perhaps you are right," sighed the young man, and fell to studying his work more critically. Gloom settled over his face. It was a face that easily changed

from brightness to melancholy. "You *are* right," he concluded. "My grammar's bad somewhere. That is always the trouble, Jackdabos. You can read, you can speak languages, you can understand. But you know nothing. Nothing at all. And you never find what you are looking for."

He rose, went to the battlements, and leaning there, fell gradually into a day-dream. From the southwest blew a warm, vernal wind, bringing to his nostrils a faint smell of Mediterranean sea-water, mingled now and then with sharper whiffs of phosphate from vineyards bordering the Camargue. Creeks of the Little Rhone, canals, inlets of the Gulf, wriggled in silver threads across a pale-green expanse of marsh-land, sparkling as though they were the only things alive. Above this drowsy present, King Louis the Crusader's ramparts, massive and forlorn, reared their long flanks as yellow-gray as wood-ashes. A feeling of desolation, mild like the sunshine, vague like the spring breeze, came over Jackdabos. He leaned, watched, and grew still as any part of the old walls.

"We dream but a little while," thought the young man. "What is our dream? Building, destroying, building up again—and *pouf!* we are gone. But Nature dreams forever, and knows the signification of the dream."

Then he woke, and snapped his fingers.

"Ah, the devil!" he scoffed. "Let us sign our work, at least."

Returning to where his trowel lay, he squatted once more, took pencil, and began to write:

"Jackdabos a travaillé ci-dessous, le . . ."

Puig's dog suddenly growled, and rose by one-half, that is, to the height of his front legs. The hair bristled on his powerful neck and shoulders.

"Quiet, my child!" cried Jackdabos, angrily. It seldom happened (and it never pleased him) that another pair of ears, on man or beast, should prove quicker of hearing than his own. "*Hé! Arrive! Lie down, thou devil of mustard hue!*"

He turned as he spoke, and saw, at the height of his first glance, two pretty little feet just clearing the topmost stair of the turret. Admirable feet, they wore tidy brown boots with red rubber soles; and on them stood a girl. The sight of red rubber pleased him, for it showed that his hearing had not been at fault.

"Ah!" said the girl, taken by surprise.

Jackdabos refrained from looking up. He did not stare at women, though he observed them well enough.

"Good doggie," said this one, in a pleasant, low voice. "Good old boy!"

"Take care!" cried Jackdabos. "*Prenez garde, mademoiselle, il n'est pas flatteur!*"

She foolishly reached forward to pat the beast, who

made ready for a spring. Just in time, Jackdabos let drive a hard little fist, which crashed on the dog's muzzle and sent him sprawling to the verge of the platform.

"Oh, cruel!" cried the girl. "Sir, that was cruel!"

Jackdabos rose, and bowed low. He knew the brindle cur much better than she; full well he knew that in one more second, but for his blow, the girl's hand would have learnt how teeth can tear; nevertheless he bowed, accepting her rebuke in silence.

"Are you always cruel to him?"

He bowed again.

"Always, mademoiselle, in the service of beauty and innocence." A grave smile flickered about his eyes. "It is not often so—necessary."

She looked at him, ill pleased to meet such grace in a shabby figure. He returned her look, quietly, with due respect. Beautiful, he called her; and for the matter of beauty he had a quick eye. Young, slight, proud, dressed in blue-gray homespun, she over-topped him by a head,—a blonde head, confidently poised. In one hand, like a wand to indicate her will, she carried a stick of polished yellow rattan, bright as her hair. Dark-blue eyes, wide open and set rather wide asunder, sparkled in disapproval.

"With permission," said Jackdabos; and he sat down to finish the legend on the mortar. While he collected his wits to recall the date, Puig's dog came

slinking back, nuzzled his ear, and lay down beside him again in the sun.

"At least," the girl declared, "your dog bears no grudge."

"No." Jackdabos thoughtfully sucked his pencil. "He is good at bottom, only a fool on top. 'Kind enough, but a huge feeder; and he sleeps by day more than the wild-cat.'"

Remembering the date, he began to write, meanwhile conscious that his visitor stood watching him closely.

"That's odd," she said. "I never heard that of wild cats; though when you think, it must be true, if they are like tame ones."

"Mademoiselle," returned the writer, carelessly, "is not then a student of the natural history?"

"No," she admitted.

"Of poetry, perhaps? No?"

"Why, of course!" she replied indignantly, as though shocked. "I *love* poetry."

"Ah, ah!" Jackdabos mumbled his pencil without looking up. "And the drama?"

She flicked her boot impatiently with the rattan stick.

"How silly," was her answer. "Everybody, who has any sense at all, adores the stage."

"Ah, ah!" repeated her questioner. "Yes, yes. Poetry and—the stage."

He tossed a flying glance in her direction. She caught the barest glint of wickedness in his black Egyptian eyes, and was tempted, for a moment, to fancy that this little velveteen vagabond who squatted there so tranquil and preoccupied, had secretly been laughing at her. It was an odd fancy. Indeed, she must have been mistaken; for there he sat, lost in contemplation, tapping a march with his pencil on the stone floor.

"Is it your trade," she asked, "to keep ruins in repair?"

"Yes, that is what I do," he answered—readily, and with a charming smile, because he did nothing of the sort. "As you observe. It is perhaps not interesting work, but——" he sighed—"harmless."

This modest melancholy had begun to please her, when he spoiled it by suddenly adding:

"I can do anything."

Her dark blue eyes opened wider than ever, and more scornfully.

"Can you indeed?"

"That is to say," he explained, "anything with my hands."

"For example?" she suggested, mockingly.

Jackdabos put away both pencil and trowel in one capacious pocket, with his right hand, which he drew forth apparently empty.

"For example," said he, unperturbed, "the calling

of dead things to life; the laying of a charm, a spell . . .” He held out his left hand. “Will you do me the honor to lend your rattan for a moment?”

The girl seemed doubtful, as though considering whether her talk, begun by chance, had not gone much too far with this stranger; but in the act of turning away, she paused, and then, curiosity conquering, gave him her walking-stick with the air of one who humors a child.

“Thank you,” said he. “Now kindly watch.”

Placing the stick upright on its brass ferule, he held it between his flat palms—a plain yellow stalk of rattan, with a bulbous root for its head.

“The jockeys used to buy this kind at Bangalore,” he murmured. “A good stick. It will obey.”

Slowly, with a soothing motion, he began to stroke it gently, his hands parallel, his eyes following them up and down, up and down, his lips moving in a whisper.

“Obey! Obey!”

Of a sudden he let go. His hands, rigid and still parallel, sprang half a yard apart. Between them, as if magnetized, the yellow rattan stood by itself on end, all a-quiver.

“Bow,” he ordered, smiling. “Bow to the prettiest.”

The stick trembled, reeled slightly, then with a

queer effect of almost animate dignity, swayed forward in her direction, once, twice.

"Oh! What——" The girl started back in dismay against the battlements.

"Have no fear," he answered; and even while he spoke, the rattan fell clattering on the stone platform.

"What is that?" She stared like a dreamer.

He laughed quietly, as he brushed his hands.

"It is nothing, mademoiselle. A kind of charm—magic, if you like—a very old trick. Moses could turn 'em into a serpent; but he had no monopoly of that skill, for the magicians of Egypt did the same likewise, you remember."

He returned the stick to her casually, and sat thinking. As for the girl, she took back her property with visible repugnance, handling it in a gingerly way, scanning it from root to ferule, ready to drop it at the first sign of misbehavior. It made none. The rattan was only a lifeless rattan.

"How queer!" She gave a doubtful laugh. "You are very—clever."

Jackdabos, musing, shook his head mournfully. Just then he was trying to remember where he had seen another face modelled like hers—broad below the temples, tapering down toward the chin, and refined a little too fastidiously, too perfectly, along each delicate edge of nose and lips.

“Ah, bah!” said he, snapping his fingers, impatient and baffled. “Bah! Dia! My memory is no good. The sunburn has colored you so wholesome, and then your eyes, mademoiselle, are so lovely dark sea blue. They drive the resemblance out of my head, or I should make you a compliment. Diable, diable, diable! Ass of a memory!”

She looked down, and saw him beating his round pate in despair with both fists. It was not a reassuring pantomime. Confounded, also, by the frankness of his words, she drew silently away and left him there by the snoring dog. Aigues-Mortes lay under her left hand, a picture-puzzle of tiled squares all fitted together, red and russet, in the afternoon sun; round them curved the ramparts of the saintly Crusader, tremendous, forlorn; and she followed their curve toward the Porte de la Gardette, hurrying to reach the custodian's house, for her way seemed dangerous and long. Stillness, desolation of the past, a feeling as of one gone astray, surrounded and frightened her. She smiled at these terrors, but did not once look behind.

“I am awfully silly,” she thought. “I had better come back into my own world.”

Jackdabos remained very still, watching her blue-gray figure dwindle across the gigantic arc of battlements. When she had disappeared, he rose.

"Foul donkey!" he cried, his cheeks flaming with anger.

He ran to the nearest embrasure, and flung his trowel spinning into the sunlight toward the melancholy marshes veined with glittering creeks.

"You, the scourge of God! You to make a charm!"

He watched the trowel fall and bury itself in the spring grass below. Ramming both hands into the pockets of his velveteen, he shook his head ferociously at the landscape, and ground his teeth. For a moment he remained thus, leaning out, wedged in the parapet, like a gargoyle or a little brown goblin left behind to guard that mediaeval fortress. Then he laughed.

"Ah, bosh! You are no good!" he informed himself. "A trickster. A mountebank. Always showing off, Monsieur Jackdabos."

He turned, to stare along the ramparts toward the *Porte de la Gardette*.

"But she was very pretty," he sighed. "Come, dog. Let us go. Come, awake! Yes, my friend, my dirt-brindle savage, that lady was of another circle from ours; but she was very, very, very pretty!"

CHAPTER II

SHOEING THE ASS

A SMALL white donkey, wearing a bridle of scarlet leather, stood hitched to an iron ring within the ramparts, pensively flicking her ears in time to Puig's hammer. The forge and anvil lay just behind her heels. It was a portable smithy—a handful of worn tools, a bag of charcoal, and a bucket of water—set up, or thrown down by chance, under a vaulted arch near the town gate. Puig's hammer went cling-clang, but lazily at long intervals, for he was talking. The little white ass had plenty of time to doze and wake again.

“Why do you think so?” asked Puig in his quick, harsh way. A sturdy, grimy, freckled rascal, with a tight little reddish mustache, he stared at the bit of iron cooling between his tongs. A leathern apron covered him like armor from neck to ankles. No cat had paler, greener eyes than Puig's, or half so full of calculation. His face wore a puckered smile, not of good humor, but muscular habit. “Do you think

at all, Barjavel, or are you talking in your sleep? Why should we go to Arles? Is it, then, at Arles?"

He sat uncomfortably on an old paving-stone, and snapped the questions over his shoulder. Behind him, where sunshine brightened the bluish films of his forge smoke, Barjavel, the giant, lay stretched along the back wall of the vault.

"Why not?" demanded Barjavel, without stirring his rotund body. He spoke through a black felt hat which covered his face, but the rampart arch echoed barytone music. "Why not there? I remember a certain text of the emperor Honorius—hm! Yes, roughly about four hundred Anno Domini. Official text." He yawned. "It says: 'All that the Orient, all that Araby with her perfumes, all that Assyria boasts of opulence, all that Africa, or fair Spain, or fertile Gallia can produce, all these are found in as great abundance at Arles.'" He yawned again. "Ah, gods of mankind, what a memory I have! What a brain I bear!"

With a sigh of admiration, Barjavel stretched, and folded his enormous hands again to sleep.

"Bah!" sneered Puig. "You always quote some devilish book, and tell a useless fact. If I ask you the time of day, my colossus, you answer me that the Rhone is full of water, Henri Quatre is dead, and the Dutch have taken Holland. How you manage this learning, I don't know. Where do you read, and

when? Never yet have I seen your bulb of a nose stuck into a book, or anything but the neck of a bottle. Bah! Four hundred Anno Domini? Four hundred thousand Bulgarians of turnips!"

Barjavel lay breathing peacefully under the black hat.

"I study," came his drawling, muffled voice, "I do my reading in the library of the locusts."

"Ah, bosh!" Puig, returning to work, thrust iron into fire. "Where is that library? Is it open to great fat ones?"

"It is not open to many," sounded the musical voice under the hat. "Indeed, it is locked. To enter, one must have the key of the fields, my friend."

Puig made a wry face, and began pumping the handles of a leaky bellows. The fire glowed faintly in the sunlight, and his iron was slow to heat. The little white ass gazed round, along her dusty flank, wondering at the wheeze and the eddy of ashes.

"And I was telling you a thing," complained the blacksmith, "of importance! A thing which might fetch us all great sums of money."

"Money?" droned Barjavel, between snores. "Money is not important."

Puig dropped his bellows, with a snort of irritation.

"You need not be so god-like! I, for my part, I also do not crave money. But other people do!"

The giant in the vault uncrossed his legs, re-crossed them, and groaned with comfort.

"That is true," he murmured. "Unluckily for the world. That is where it pinches, as the scorpion said."

While they spoke, through the deserted square came a sinewy, light-stepping youngster in brown velvet-reen, with an ugly dog at his heels. It was Jackdabos, exceedingly wide awake, and fresh from hurrying across the diameter of Aigues-Mortes. Quiet, smiling, he drew near the forge and plumped down on the ground between the two disputants. The brindle dog curled alongside his master's anvil.

"Continue, gentlemen," said Jackdabos. "Your conversation is in the highest degree interesting."

Neither workman nor sleeper so much as looked at him. The bellows puffed again, the ashes flew, the iron turned a pale red, the ass lowered her long ears and meditated, blinking.

"Money or not," said Barjavel's voice, out of an apparent slumber, "go on, my dear Puig. Tell me your entire story again. What was it you wish to unearth?"

Jackdabos sat up, very attentive.

"Unearth?" he repeated. "Ah, ah! Let me hear. Recount, recount. Something to unearth?"

Puig's cat-green eyes turned a baleful stare on the intruder.

“This is my concern, Jackdaw,” he declared, in a jealous tone. “I’m not the clever chap of our party. I can’t play the romantic like you, or the poet like our fat friend. But when I do talk, it’s clear and to the point. Further, you are not the only man who can discover and unearth anything, remember that. And yet again, I know *what* I’m looking for, me.”

Jackdabos, with a quirk of the lips and a sidelong sparkle of a glance, agreed. Crosslegged, alert, his round black head bare to the sunshine, he resembled more than ever the Egyptian scribe; and like that gentleman, he waited pleasantly, with no hard feeling for a hard word. He was still in the twenties, Puig well over thirty; toward all seniors he was inclined to be respectful; and then he liked Puig, though nothing really bound the two men in friendship, or in common interest, except that each had borne arms and seen fighting.

“I’m ignorant, I know little,” sneered Puig, drawing out his red-hot iron, and hammering it to the form of a tiny half-oval round the anvil-point. “But that little, I can make clear. Iron-working renders a man exact. Hold up, thou brute of atrocious habit!”

He caught the ass by a hind fetlock, and tried the glowing iron upon her hoof, amid curling smoke and the bitter smell of burnt horn. Then, poking the shoe

among the coals again, he laid down the law with his tongs.

“Attend,” said he, frowning. “Here is my story. One day, when I wore the red bags in Algiers, behold, of a Sunday afternoon, I was walking a street below the Kasbah, with nothing on my mind. There was no noise in the crowd, all sunny and tranquil as here, when by chance I turned, and lo, there wandered past me a sort of Frenchman dressed as an Arab, in long, sea-green gown, with blood bursting through all down his back. I helped him home to a frightful cavern of a room; and there he died, being stabbed right under the left shoulder blade. *Bon soir!* He died badly. It was not at all diverting. I never knew his name, or why, or how.”

Puig suddenly remembered his bellows, and fell to blowing again.

“Attend!” he at last continued. “This dying man was grateful, though he spoke very poorly, and his eyeballs were coated with blue like an old dog’s. He told me how a great gold plate, a chiselled platter of gold, lies buried in the garden of a Monsieur . . . Monsieur Goiffon. Now this garden lies somewhere on the Riviera.”

The somnolent voice of Barjavel sounded from his hat.

“A plate of gold? That is trivial, unlikely, and vulgar.”

Puig sat erect, as though stung. His freckled face grew all of a knot with rage; his tight silken moustache bristled.

"Vulgar?" he cried. "Wait! It was a work beyond price, done by a fellow—what's his name again? Ah, bah, tell me! The fellow's name sounds like something to eat. Tell me, now."

Both his hearers told him at once, gladly, chiming in by turns with satire.

"Langouste à l'Americaine."

"Sausages of Coron the Elder."

"Ecrevisses."

"Œufs durs."

"Degustation of oysters."

Puig met this impudence with a lofty and forcible calm. He began punching nail-holes in the little red-hot shoe. When his hammer had rung many strokes, and he had been sufficiently implored, he bethought himself, and said:

"No. It was Italian. And nothing to eat, after all. What the devil's that name? Come! How do you call matches in Italian, wax vestas? You don't know."

"Cerini," said Jackdabos.

Puig punched another hole, before the shoe became covered again with the gray scales of cooling.

"You have it," he declared, nodding. "That's the name, or next door. Cellini."

The giant sleeping in the vault rose all of a piece, sat up, and whacked both feet on the stone floor.

"Cellini?" he bellowed, catching his hat as it fell. "Benvenuto Cellini? Why under the stars couldn't you say so before? Pig of good fortune! This becomes a practical matter."

Barjavel, roused from his noonday dream, had the majesty of a lion, but a careless, unkempt, rather merry lion with black hair. His mane and beard, darker than jet, covered with tousled wilderness all his great face, except a pair of ruddy cheekbones, an Olympian forehead, jovial red lips, and big, sleepy gray eyes beginning to glow. When he yawned, as now, his teeth flashed carnivorous. Of commanding size and presence, but clothed in rusty, crumpled black serge, he stretched like an Assyrian king recovering from a spree. Yet no debauchery hovered about the man; his eyes were as clear as a champion's, and his huge frame had nothing to do with corpulence.

"Benvenuto Cellini?" he sang again. "Go on. You begin to talk sense."

Puig looked shifty and doubtful.

"What's Cellini, anyway?" he said. "Something good? Something fashionable? Money in him? Is Cellini fashionable, or has he been a long time dead?"

Barjavel frowned mightily.

"Don't have a petty mind, Puigo," he answered.

“Good? Something good? No, the best. Cellini, king of liars, emperor of goldsmiths, god of all splendid line-workers. Cellini, *le bienvenu*:

“ ‘Welcome he mounts, as Welcome down he came
Into the flower of this good Tuscan land.’ ”

The dirty old son-of-a-gun! If you have stumbled on the track of anything *he* made, allow me to accompany you!”

Jackdabos cracked his fists together.

“Omen! An omen!” he cried, and made his two friends stare at him. “Cellini? Hold hard. That was the very thing I couldn’t remember. Just now on the ramparts I met a girl, and her face was like Cellini’s *Ganymede*, that restoration of a statue, fine, but a little too fine, along the edges.”

“Oho,” said Puig unctuously, “you met a girl, did you?”

He gave Barjavel a wink. The young man flushed indignantly, and remained silent. For a time the flow of their talk was broken. A long, covered cart, drawn by two plump Camargue roans, rattled across the cobbles of the *Place*, and halted before the Café of the Universe, where the driver, a gypsy-looking fellow, descended briskly to get a drink. A few children—solemn, brown-eyed creatures loitering—came and paused near the forge-fire to watch the shoeing of

the ass. When they had passed on, disappointed at finding Puig's work so slack, and when the driver, wiping his lips, had remounted his cart and driven rumbling away, Barjavel resumed the discussion.

"My dear Jackdaw," said he, with a gleam of paternal benevolence in his eyes, "pardon me. I have no doubt the young lady——" He paused, and repeated the noun with emphasis—"the young lady was of a rare and beautiful design. But now continue, my Puig, my brave donkey-farrier. Where is this Cellini plate of yours to be seen? Do you know where Monsieur Goiffon's garden is? I might be of help——"

Puig the surly began punching holes again. He plainly felt himself to be rebuked.

"Goiffon's garden," he replied, without looking up, "is somewhere past Monte Carlo, and again, somewhere beyond a place called Rochers Rouges."

"Oh," said Barjavel, "I know, then. It's in Italy, that garden."

Puig burst out swearing, and spat on his hammer-head.

"What rotten luck!" he growled. "Italy! By the four corners of hell, what luck I always break my nose against. No use now. We couldn't get a treasure like that out of Italy, across the frontier. Good-bye, gold plate! I shall stay poor all my life."

He dropped the shoe hissing into the water bucket,

fished it out, and with great energy nailed it home on the ass's hoof; then, after tweaking the points off the nails, he took a long rasp and finished his job neatly, so that the hoof shone a smooth clay-blue, studded and rimmed as with silver.

Then, and not till then, Barjavel spoke, combing his wild beard with sturdy fingers.

"How wrong," he meditated, "how wrong you are to despise reading, which is the antidote to despair, the medicine of hope. For example. Between 1894 and 1907, a certain man—one single man—took from Italy no less than the Chigi Botticelli and the bronze Bindo d'Antonio Altoviti. Come, Puig, you did not know that?" He turned his quizzical gray eyes toward the farrier, and smiled. "No? Then see. Reading is not only pleasant, but of great profit. We learn, boys, we learn, and the past informs the future. What one man has done, three men like us can do, and more."

Puig folded his fists in the lap of his leather apron, and stared.

"What do you mean?" he demanded sceptically.

"I mean," replied the lazy giant, brushing his hat, "I mean what I said before, it's a practical matter. The thing can be pulled off. Let's have a run for your plate."

Jackdabos jumped like a frog.

"Hurrray!" he cried. "Come on!"

The smith rose awkwardly, stretched, removed his apron, rolled up his tools inside it, flung the water from his bucket, and with the grim look of a man in a hurry, seemed ready to break camp and start at once on their enterprise.

“Wait, though!” He struck his freckled forehead with impatience. “Here stands this beastly white ass to be called for. I must wait till the owner comes.”

He glanced angrily roundabout, then toward the *Porte de la Gardette*. His face brightened.

“Ah!” he snorted, with a gesture of relief. “Pat on the hour! Here she comes, now.”

CHAPTER III

WAYFARERS

“A WONDER!” jeered Puig. “See! A woman arrives on time.”

From the stone stairway by the guardian’s mysterious little cavern house, two persons were, as a matter of fact, arriving: a straight young man in very worldly tramping costume, belted and knickerbockered, and by his side a girl in blue-gray homespun, who carried a rattan stick.

“You mean,” said Barjavel, rising, “a lady. That is nothing wonderful. A lady values her word. There are many words, but few ladies. Am I not right, Jackdaw?”

The Jackdaw gasped, overcome with surprise and embarrassment. As the two strangers came near, he bowed, and was rewarded with a friendly though timid glance from that pair of sea-blue eyes which he had praised. The belted hero—a blond youth, plainly the girl’s brother—gave him an ice-cold stare, before demanding:

“Well? Got the animal shod, have you?”

Puig removed his villainous cap, answered in a flow of polite words, and, stooping, lifted the hoofs of the ass one by one.

“You see? We have done a serious piece of work. I hope the lady is content?”

“Humph!” said her brother, purse in hand. “Here’s your money.”

An umpire, had one stood by, might have called the shoer of the ass more courteous than the owners. Perhaps the girl had some such thought, for she smiled at Puig, and, stooping beside him, carefully inspected the little iron rims.

“Thank you, monsieur. They are beautifully put on.”

Puig, appeased by the word “monsieur,” grinned like a lynx. It was to the girl that he bowed, even while her brother dropped a silver coin into his blackened paw, saying:

“Come, Ruth, we must be off.”

She turned obediently, but not before the great Barjavel could pay her a compliment.

“Mademoiselle.” He had the best manners of them all, careless good manners; for both words and gesture came direct from the heart. “You make my friend’s work a pleasure. It is not child’s play to shape and fit such tiny shoes. You have seen this, mademoiselle, and, therefore, you give him the best

praise—praise from one who looks, and sees, and understands.”

Barjavel beamed down at her like a loving but highly critical father. Puig stood bobbing with delight. As for the poor Jackdaw, he had withdrawn a pace under the vaulted arch, and studied their by-play sadly, alone, aloof, and dejected.

“Come along, Ruth,” repeated the girl’s brother sharply, as he unhitched the head-rope of the scarlet bridle from the ring, and led their donkey clattering out upon the cobblestones. “Much obliged to you all, of course.”

This time, however, his sister proved not quite so docile. Holding her ground, she prolonged the talk for kindness’ sake.

“Our poor beast will be grateful,” she said. “We came a long way from beyond Montpellier, and have still far to go. Many thanks for your careful repairs.” She gave a nod and a smile, which suddenly included Jackdabos, toward whom lifting her rattan with a quick, unconscious grace, she added: “I sha’n’t forget the magician of Pharaoh, who made my stick do me reverence.”

Then, as though frightened, she was away. Between her and her brother, the white ass ambled across the pavement, slow and submissive, with a rope of tail swinging patiently to the clink of the new shoes. The girl’s hair glistened in the sunlight as she went

talking and laughing. Her brother shook his head, and blurted out reproof.

"I've told you, time and time again! You must *not* go chumming with such people. They can't understand it. . . ."

"Why, Ralph," she rejoined. "What else did we come to see but . . ."

Her voice died away in the distance. The belted youth, turning a handsome, angry, Antinous profile, scolded her over the donkey's ears; and so, arguing in pantomime, brother and sister led their slow-footed beast round the corner, and disappeared.

After they had gone, the farrier and his two friends remained still watching the corner. Puig was first man to speak. He provoked the Jackdaw with a jeering glance and a chuckle.

"Did a little magic for her, did you? Clever boy. What kind?"

Jackdabos turned red as leather.

"Say one word more like that——" he began, stammering with wrath.

Barjavel laid his broad hand on the boy's shoulder, as if by chance.

"Well," he sighed, in deep soliloquy, gazing at the corner, "well, we really lost something, you know, when she took the light of her eyes away. Ah, me, the world! Come," he cried, catching each man by

an arm, "let's not repine. Come, leave our tools with daddy."

And laughing, he pushed them away from the vault.

"Look here, though," objected Puig, while he lifted his apronful of tools, and the Jackdaw caught up anvil and bucket—"look here. Why does a beauty like that girl, and a gilded snob who's nothing but *l'homme chic*, go mucking round amongst our kind, on foot, with a hairy old she-ass? It ain't natural. What's their game? Tell me."

Barjavel the giant laughed again, and swept his arm generously along the picture of their surroundings—the ancient yellow-gray walls, the Tower of Constance looming against the sunlight, the garish-colored fronts of house and shop across the way.

"Romance!" he chanted. "How can I explain? Nobody can. Nobody knows." He played thoughtfully with a broad piece of silver. "I suppose this pair, though, this Ralph and his sister, are travelling in a vain attempt to see what they have read in books. Yes, probably. A Scotchman whose name I forget once led a donkey round the Cévennes, then wrote about himself and his donkey. It was a dainty, pleasant book, which made ass-driving romantic. Hence, our young friends to-day are trudging after—after what?—something which it is not in them to find, poor children."

Puig started on to cross the road, nodding his head, well satisfied.

"You're right," he agreed. "They'll try to do the same. They'll put us low-lives into print, and make us fashionable. I understand, now. She's a pretty girl, but like all the rest of 'em she has an oblong brain. Ah, bah! The brain sharp as a brick, entirely oblong."

This piece of slang gave so great offence to Jackdabos, that he not only ran after Puig, but seemed ready to drop the anvil and fight him in the middle of the street. The peace-making colossus, however, shoved them both ahead with irresistible good nature, and so into the Café of the Universe.

There sat daddy in his black coat behind the zinc bar.

"Good day, my sons," he chirped, out of the perpetual dusk surrounding his throne. "What is the row? You are assassinated?"

Barjavel flung his money on the zinc.

"Three of the same, Father, for three bad, thirsty boys. We are off to Arles. Kindly put Puigo's batch of tools in a sterilized place till we return."

A moment later the three friends were outdoors again, ready for the road. Jackdabos carried over his shoulder an old canvas bag, well stuffed. He marched with a light, rolling swing, foot over foot on a straight line, as a cat walks a fence or a man

walks in moccasins. Puig went slouching, baggy and loose-kneed, with toes turned out, and fists crammed into pockets. Great Barjavel, who overtopped them both, strode along jauntily, humming deep in his chest, canting his head from shoulder to shoulder, with lazy, half-shut eyes twinkling on the world. No one tried to keep step; and the brindle dog slunk behind them, abject and stealthy, as though afraid of being sent home when he had no home on earth.

“ ‘*Vigni-vignons, vignons le vin,
La voilà, la joli’ vigne au vin,
La voilà, la joli’ vigne!*’ ”

The giant ceased his humming, to stick a red clay pipe into his beard, then struck a match on the town gate, and said, puffing lustily:

“Great things are before us. I feel my old bones coming to life again.”

So with a fair start they passed from under the rampart shadow to the open country. Before them a hard gray road stretched monotonous, unpromising, far across flat fields toward the flat Camargue. For several miles they tramped in silence, briskly and doggedly; but when at Silveréal they were ferried across the sad brown flood of the Lesser Rhone, and had hauled on the ferryman’s cable to help him, their tongues were loosened again, and with pleasant loiter-

ing and gossip they stepped ashore on the Camargue itself. Over that plain, that strange "land of the white horse and the black bull," the afternoon sunshine wasted its last brightness. Though touched with pale green spring-time, earth remained dismal, tranquil, and vast, unrolled as a mere base for the sky and the long, distant ranges of gleaming clouds.

"But that's all right," sighed Barjavel, contentedly. "Weariness underfoot; and overhead, the unattainable."

Jackdabos turned, with a startled air.

"Do *you* think those things, too?" he cried, as if wonderstruck. "I never knew anybody else did."

"Ah, my boy," laughed the other, "you are very young!"

Puig, who hated such talk, lounged along in surly meditation. Against the all-pervading odor of vineyard phosphate he screwed up his nose and moustache into a twist, so that he walked perpetually sneering. From a long silence he broke out:

"That young man in the passion-coat, him and his sister, they're too much for me! What do the fools expect, tramping a desert like this, keeping time to a donkey's hind legs? Fools. That's what I say, a pair of fools."

"And what," murmured Barjavel, "do we three fools expect?"

Puig had a superior grunt and an answer ready.

"One jolly gold plate," said he, with gusto. "A piece of Cellini plate worth all the colored bank-notes you can cram in your pockets, eh? Thirty years it's waited for us in Goiffon's garden, two metres from the cornermost orange tree toward the northwest. Is that clear, or not? Come! Do you often catch me mooning? Is my name Philibert Puig? Am I talking vapors?"

Barjavel smoked his red clay calmly, humming, and rolling his head.

"Nevertheless, we are fools, too, my dear," he replied. "A garden, since Adam, is the spot where one digs. Thirty years of digging will uncover many strange things. Ah, yes. And then sometimes a gardener cuts down his orange tree, if it has failed. Thirty years, my friend. Time, time is our enemy."

Puig halted, stared gloomily at his companions, then cursed himself and them.

"*Espèce de puant!*" he snarled. "You are right. The place will be dug from end to end, so what's the good of travelling farther?"

The giant only nodded, sagacious as before.

"Trust me, Puig," said he, thumbing his pipe. "Trust me and hoof it along to Arles. We are all fools, but all follow some kind of hope. Am I not right, Jackdaw? Time is our enemy, hope is our friend, and the life of an old hat is to cock it. Come! Follow me on the road to Arles."

“Right you are,” sang the Jackdaw, shifting his old canvas bag. “No odds to me where I go, now. Forward.”

“No!” cried the crestfallen blacksmith. “Why make a bad matter worse? Let’s go back where my tools are.” He pointed toward the declining sun. “Dug up or not, that garden——”

“Trust me,” Barjavel repeated.

He spoke, and his eyes shone, with good-natured but mysterious authority.

“Humph!” snorted Puig, and surrendered.

They marched on again. Through the sad but marvellous plain their trio of shadows, longer and longer, drew them northeastward on the gray road. Vineyards, acres of bare soil quilted with knotty stumps; broad floors of well-sprouting grain; then empty pastures, whitened in long streaks by *sansouïro* salt marsh: these and the reddening clouds brought a few slow changes in the journey. Sometimes a troop of horses or cattle beaded the horizon, and gradually hung clear of the earth, suspended by mirage over a glassy line of air. Sometimes a farmhouse appeared among willows or stone pines—humble masonry half-buried by golden thatch, and stabbed in its ridgepole with the hilt, all askew, of the holy cross. Sunset blazed, glorified all these things, and slowly faded.

“Supper!” cried Jackdabos, halting, and pulling

from his bag three loaves of bread, a parcel of cold meat, a wine bottle. "I am hungry."

They ate in a shelter of tamarisks by the road, and saw the world become a shadow, above which in the twilight went winging a flight of red flamingoes, like birds on fire from the sunset. Afterward, the moon peered over a rim of undulating blackness. The travellers went northward, threading the gloom by fairy light.

"What," complained Puig at last, "are you going to do for us up here? Does this ramble fetch us nearer to any gold plates?"

It was after midnight when he put this question. The moon, riding aloft, showed in the distance a cluster of blanched walls and dark windows, the houses of Trinquetaille.

"I shall introduce you," replied Barjavel, "to a nice old lady. She knows all about such things, and what chance we stand of good fortune."

"Bah!" said Puig in disgust. "Fortune-telling? Don't be an ass, or think that I'm one."

Jackdabos also muttered something of disappointment.

Their huge leader smiled, and beckoned them farther on the white stillness of the road. They followed, mute and disheartened. The dog stole after them like a ghostly wolf. So they passed among the sleeping houses in Trinquetaille, came where the Great

Rhone coursed like liquid snow, and saw beyond it the roofs, the towers and spires, the Roman circus rearing its mound on shadowy arches—the city of the sixth legion, Arles, quietly dreaming in strong moonlight.

“Don’t sneer at my old lady,” murmured Barjavel. “If she tells our fortune, it will come true. It will be told for love.”

CHAPTER IV

THE LIGURIAN LADY

By Trinquetaille Bridge they crossed the snow-white river, their tired steps lagging with a hollow sound on the footway. Barjavel, a man with a purpose, led them straight through the moon-lighted Place Antonelle, then, turning to the left, threaded a labyrinth of narrow streets and lanes choked with black shadow. They moved like burglars, and seemed the only creatures alive in Arles.

"Know where you're going?" growled Puig.

"Yes. To bed," answered their guide. "Unless you prefer sleeping among the tombs in the Aliscamps?"

Jackdabos gave a chuckle.

"Not good enough," said he. "Many a time I've slept there with my nose to the moon, but I don't love that crowd. Sarcophagi make devilish hard beds, and cold, with the dust of dead men under you. Brrr!"

“Follow me, then,” said Barjavel. “And please be quiet.”

He felt his way along another walled alley, stopped at the shadowy likeness of a gate, and fumbling and jingling in his pocket brought out keys. A moment later the trio stood inside a small, disorderly courtyard; then, stumbling over rubbish, they gained the back door of a tall house, dark to the slant shadow of the wall, but its upper storey all out-staring the moon with cold, sparkling windows.

“In here,” whispered Barjavel, as he unlocked another door. “Take off your boots. No talking. I have my key to go and come, but on condition that I’m not too uproarious.”

They slipped into the house. By the smell of ingrained cookery, Jackdabos knew that he stood in a kitchen. Immediately, boots in hand, they mounted a dark staircase, then another, then along corridors where the dog’s toe-nails clattered upon tiles. At last Barjavel opened a door, and let his companions enter a great room glimmering with reflected moonshine.

“Good night,” he whispered. “Twin beds for you. I’m next door. See you in the morning.”

So saying, the giant vanished. Puig, his dog, and the Jackdaw stood in the middle of their floor, considering one another. It was a noble room, spacious and lofty, with two windows open on treetops.

“Where are we now?” said Puig loudly. “What palace has old Belshazzar brought us to?”

“Shut up!” hissed the Jackdaw. “He told us not to talk, and who cares where we are? Good night, old man.”

He shuffled off his clothes, left them coiled on the floor, and slipped with a magnificent yawn into a bed of cool, clean-smelling linen. The last thing he saw was Puig’s silhouette leaning cherub-like on a window ledge, considering some moonlight mystery below, and drinking thoughtfully now and then from a bottle. The last thing he heard was Puig’s dog snoring in a corner. Then he slid into another world—a thrilling world yet forlorn with enchantment, because the happiness was not real—where a white donkey plodded beside him, and a dream woman, young, with sea-blue eyes, looked ineffable kindness. He tried to say something vast, on which his welfare and hers hung trembling; but it would not out, and before he could force it into utterance, the donkey’s ears divided them forever, flapping, growing monstrous, and at last revolving like windmill arms in a gale. He had lost her. The vision ended bitterly in the dry dust of ages.

When he woke, the room shone full of morning sun. At his feet on his coverlet sat Puig, waiting, and watching him curiously.

"Know where you are?" demanded Puig, as though they had never been asleep.

Jackdabos lay blinking and listening. The cool, bright morning touched with glossy reflections a red tiled floor, and fine old furniture of which every contour shone polished and colored like a violin. Peace, order, cleanliness reigned in that chamber; and through the windows poured an agreeable sound, never stopping, never changing, but always novel and musical, one yet manifold as the waters of a brook.

"Is it Sunday?" yawned the Jackdaw. "If it is, I'd bet we were in the Forum."

Puig let the subject pass, and fired another question. His cat-green eyes watched close for the answer.

"How long have you known Barjavel?"

Jackdabos yawned again.

"As long as you have," he replied, stretching. "A week, isn't it? Never saw him before we all met down yonder."

"No more than that?" Puig stared with infinite suspicion.

"No more, no less." Jackdabos began to stare likewise. "What's wrong?"

The other tossed him a sheet of note-paper.

"Read this," he snapped. "Found it on that chest of drawers with the mirror, there."

The young man rubbed his eyes and read.

“Received of Monsieur Barjavel,” ran the brief manuscript, “full payment of the rent of his chambers for three months . . .”

The sum was princely, acknowledged with fitting thanks, compliments, and the flourished signature of a hotel-keeper. Jackdabos rubbed his eyes again, read again, and sat bolt upright.

“Tiny Saviour!” he exclaimed. “Barjavel paid all that? What a sum!”

Puig nodded grimly from the foot of the bed.

“Just so,” he growled. “But look here. Who is this Barjavel of ours? He never has money, eh? Travels on foot, eh? Couldn’t buy a third-class ticket for the train: made us hoof it all night. Eh? What? How? And still he carries a private key to the best hotel, and hires a set of rooms in the heart of town. Go look.”

Jackdabos bounced from bed and ran to the nearer window.

“Heavenly cabbage!” he cried. “You’re right. I was right. It’s the Place of the Men.”

Below him lay the Forum, a pleasant square surrounded by leafy plane-trees, and crowded from end to end with honest men, good plain men wearing their Sunday clothes. Their talk it was, the lively, ceaseless music of Provence, which rose from half a hundred little groups and went on and on like runnels of a brook. A few soldiers and police moved

among them, fraternally. Mistral the poet, in bronze, looked over them with neighborly pride from his sculptured pedestal. Their voices made as it were incense round his statue, in the plane-tree light and shade.

"Aha, the beautiful Sunday!" said Jackdabos. "Oho, the good fellows!"

And he leaned forth naked as a god, sniffing the air, drinking deeply the sound of their talk.

"But come here," persisted Puig, hauling him indoors again. "That's all very well. We're living in hotel rooms on the Forum. Good! But Barjavel pays our bill, eh?" He shook the mysterious receipt under the Jackdaw's nose. "Now tell me. Who is Barjavel? How does this happen?"

Somebody just then knocked at the door.

"Come!" called the Jackdaw.

The door opened, and in walked Barjavel himself. Two waiters followed him, bearing trays with coffee, golden-crustéd *croissants*, and glass pots of honey.

"Good morning!" sang Barjavel. He came smiling, greatly refreshed and rejuvenated, his beard well trimmed, his old black clothes brushed clean of travel-stains. "I heard you talking, and ordered breakfast for you. It's not too early?"

Puig beat a guilty retreat from the dressing-table, too late. He was caught replacing the tell-tale paper. Jackdabos rushed for his clothes.

"There's no hurry." Barjavel ignored their confusion. "I've already breakfasted; but let me sit down at your table?" He saw that the trays were properly arranged, then dismissed the bowing waiters. "Have you slept well, boys?"

Breakfast was a good meal spoiled by constraint. Puig sat on nettles, waiting to be accused; Jackdabos became aware for the first time that Puig had vile, sticky manners at table; still, they ate and talked, while Barjavel smoked a cigarette, fed the dog, and entertained them benignly. When the stream of Provençal voices from the Forum was at last running dry, they rose all three and made ready to depart.

"I've got no business in a hotel," declared the Jackdaw, smoothing his bedraggled brown velveteen.

"Don't be vain," said their host. "Come on. Cheer-oh. Leave your bag here."

He herded them along red-tiled corridors, down two flights, and through a lobby from which a visored porter set them free, louting low, as if he saw nothing strange about them or their dog. They passed into the Place of the Men, a leafy place now almost vacant at the approach of noonday.

"Whoo!" Jackdabos vented a sigh of liberty. "It's better outdoors."

Barjaval nodded, and pulled his black felt hat to an arrogant pitch.

"Great deal better," he agreed. "How do you like this bronze Mistral up here?"

Jackdabos regarded the familiar statue as they passed below it.

"Well enough," he replied. "Looks too much like Buffalo Bill. I could make as good ones if I had a workshop."

"And metal," added Puig sourly. "Metal costs money."

Barjavel surprised them by showing emotion.

"No!" He halted, and stared fixedly down at the irreverent Jackdaw. "No, could you?"

It seemed an idle question, but he considered it deeply in silence, beard on bosom, while they wandered through a succession of narrow streets. Contemplation of the Jackdaw's boast, indeed, made him forget nearer matters; for suddenly halting, he snapped his fingers, muttered a "Pshaw!" at his own absence of mind, turned about face, and led them back to a door which they had already admired in passing. It was a fine old door between a pair of twisted dolphin columns. Aloft in the house-front a niche contained two fragmentary stone saints, gray, weatherworn, and both for their harmless piety beheaded long ago by some revolutionist fool. Curved iron bars guarded the street windows. Puig, nodding approval, fingered the graceful lines of this iron-work. Jackdabos patted the stone dolphins.

Barjavel whipped from his pocket a card on which, holding it against the door, he pencilled a few lines; and then, to his friends' amazement, he lifted the great iron knocker and rapped loudly twice.

"Hold on!" cried the others. "What are you doing?"

The door swung open, and a grave, dark man-servant, looking out, seemed ready to repeat this question.

"Good day," said Barjavel. "What a beautiful door it is your pleasure to keep!"

The man-servant regarded them all three with disfavor.

"No doubt," he cooed like an ironical dove, "no doubt monsieur is an adept of such beauties."

He began to close this one, when Barjavel laughed and poked his card through the lessening gap. No sooner had the man spied the writing, than his dark face grew convulsed with wonder, and he flung the door wide open.

"Oh, it is——" he cried, abasing himself and staring. "Come in, sir . . . forgive me . . . I beg . . . I did not know . . ."

He bowed them in, fluttering with a kind of joyful submission. They left Puig's brindle dog sitting disconsolate by the dolphin pillars, and entered the house. A cool, dark vestibule opened on a pleasant room which ran the full depth of the house. Here

the servant left them standing by the front window, contemplating a vista of mahogany, marble, and dusky painted pictures. At one rear window the sunshine joggled in a large bowl of swimming gold-fish.

"Hell," muttered Puig, scuffing his feet and looking round bashfully, "I never asked you to bring me here."

A trundling noise interrupted his complaint, as into the room at the sunlit end came the man-servant, pushing a wheeled chair in which sat a little, frail, dark lady.

"Enough. Thank you," she sighed.

The servant halted her chair near the gold-fish bowl, and left the room. She reclined with patient dignity, like a Roman matron, eyed her visitors pensively for a moment; then, lifting one hand from her lap, made a civil gesture with a card—Barjavel's card.

"My old friend, you are welcome," she declared, in a low, silvery voice. "What you have written prevents me from saying how very welcome, and why. But that is understood. You leave me, therefore, only the pleasure of asking, in what can I serve you?"

Barjavel strode forward into the light, bowed over her chair-wheels, and briefly named his two com-

panions. The lady's black eyes sparkled at them. She nodded kindly.

"I have informed these young men," explained the giant, "that you know everything."

They bowed.

"We are adventurers who need your help. Will you please tell us," he continued, "whether Monsieur Goiffon's garden still has the orange trees which flourished there some years ago?"

The question puzzled her for a moment.

"You ask me? You?" she exclaimed, knitting her brows at Barjavel. "No. Indeed, no. His orange trees were all cut down before the garden—passed to its present owner. I believe new trees were planted."

"I feared so," he replied, nodding. "I could not remember. But was there not a map drawn by Monsieur Goiffon—a map or plan of the garden as it stood in his day?"

The lady raised a frail hand to her forehead, and thought.

"There was, my dear," she answered, after a pause. "You are right. There is now. Framed under glass, a quaint little colored map in the old style . . . just such a plaything as he took delight in. It hangs or should hang to this day, in the Villa Pervinea."

She looked up, smiling, like one whose memory had triumphed.

“Ah, Madam,” cried Barjavel, “you are as wonderful as ever. Was I wrong in saying that you know all things?” He beamed on the company, irradiating them. “Last night my friends here, who are young, spoke scornfully of gifts like yours. They must admit you know the past. Now do look them over and tell them their futures.”

“Oh, no!” laughed the lady. “You are the same foolish boy.”

“Oh, yes, I pray you!” And he beckoned the Jackdaw and Puig to draw near.

They came across the room, stood beside him, and awaited further orders, the one sheepish, the other highly expectant, with dancing eyes. At close range they found the lady even smaller and frailer in body than she had first appeared, calm, almost apathetic, but wonderfully alert in her glances. Plain black silk she wore, with a lace collar. Her cheeks were pale brown; her features, at once bold and delicate, of the type called Ligurian; and while she sat there motionless, the gold-fish bowl cast a light quivering over her as though it were the outward shine and play of her intelligence. To so much had the Jackdaw given heed, when he found her smiling at him and saying:

“You are not the sceptic, my son, for in you I see plenty of faith. You are following beauty with your eyes shut. When you find her you will follow with

your eyes open, as a man ought. She will come to you from the past, from something built in old stonework. Sorrow, too; yes, you cannot avoid sorrow. But have no fear."

She lifted her slender brown hand in sign of encouragement. Jackdabos made a sudden dart, quick as a humming-bird, and as lightly kissed the hand before it withdrew.

"Madam!" he cried. "You can read dreams, even a man's own dream!"

When Puig's turn came, the Ligurian lady was not smiling. She looked long at the freckled blacksmith, who returned her look humbly enough, but steadily, with a dull patience.

"You, sir," she began in doubt; then sighed, and took courage. "You must pardon the whims of an invalid, a woman who stays in her house all day. We think strange things; and if I must tell what I believe of you—shall I?" She glanced up and round. Puig nodded consent. His companions did likewise. "Then," she continued gravely, her coal-black eyes looking clear through them all, through the long room, and, as it were, out of the house; "then this is what I believe. Sir, you will never be happy till you do day labor, working hard, for a man who beats you—beats you with tongue and fist, and conquers you. That is the far future, as I see it. The near future——" She paused again; her eyes returned

from their search to meet Puig's green orbs balefully staring down at her. "My friend, I'm sorry to say, there is death in it. You shall lose the one who loves you most."

Silence followed her words, and filled the dusky room as with a spell. Then Puig broke it, moving his awkward boots.

"Most?" He gave a bitter laugh. "Madam, you flatter me. There's no person who loves my kind at all; nobody would think twice of me. Maybe my dog. He gets his food. No one else."

"I am sorry," replied the dark lady. "What I have said . . . But, perhaps, it was a sick-room fancy, no more."

So saying, she lifted from a taboret beside her a bronze apostle bell, and set it jingling musically. Her quiet man-servant answered the call, fetching a tray with three glasses of wine. It was the common pale-rose wine of some neighboring vineyard, but the men received it like courtiers honored by a queen.

"Not to my health," she said quickly, as they raised their glasses. "I desire no health or prolongation of days, as you——" Her glance rested on Barjavel, with a melancholy smile—"as you desire no fortune. Drink, my dears, to your adventure."

When, after due ceremony, they filed outdoors again and were half-way down the street, they went like people wrapt in a day-dream. The two older

men moved slowly, downcast and sombre; Jackdabos walked on air; and the dog, released from his post of watching by the dolphins, gambolled awkwardly roundabout and was pushed away unregarded.

“Who was she?” said Puig at last. “How can she pretend to know so much?”

“She?” murmured Barjavel, turning into a narrow way which led toward the P. L. M. station. “She is Goiffon’s widow. You didn’t know Goiffon. He died young, or he’d have made a great painter. I *mean* great. One of that crowd, he was, who—gods of mankind, I’m talking ancient history! They’re all dead. You can’t remember the old inn stairs at Gretz.”

While he spoke, a purring sound behind them grew swiftly into a muffled roar, as like a blast of wind came whirling a low, gray monster that charged and scattered them right and left. They caught an impression of goggling brass lamps, of a leather-clad puppet steering, and of complacent cushioned women lolling, veiled, in a row. A bark and a yell of agony mingled in this vision. Then the motor-car was past, flipping back some refuse from under its wheels—twisted refuse that grew limp and straight.

The brindle cur would never gambol underfoot again to be shoved aside. He lay flat on the roadway, dead, with a band of dust across his poor, ugly hide.

“Oh!” cried all three men in a wail of pity; the beast had been so exuberant with life, and now lay so clumsy and still.

Puig stared for only an instant; then his right hand flew behind his hip, and made a peculiar twisting motion.

“*Je me venge!*” he cried, choking. Bright steel flashed in the noonday sun. “*Oh, je me venge!*”

He leaped over the dead body, and, gripping a naked knife, ran at full speed after the monster of gray metal that fled purring down the narrow street.

CHAPTER V

LOSSES BY THE WAY

JACKDABOS crouched beside the dog, but only for a moment. There was nothing to do. No one, not all the king's horses and all the king's men, could be of any service here. He rose, and shook his head.

"*Malheur!*" mourned the giant.

At last Puig came staggering back round the corner, sheathing his knife as he came. Tears and sweat ran grossly down his freckled cheeks. Panting and sobbing, he shook both arms out rigidly before him, in the gesture of a wild man.

"The cowards would not stop!" he blubbered. "They kill and run away, the cowards! They heard me, the women looked back, and they would not stop!"

Barjavel only nodded.

"If it were a child, my dear," he said, "it would be the same thing—kill and run. We mustn't expect to find a heart inside that kind of people; no, not even a brain; nothing but food."

The bitterness of his tone acted as a comfort. Puig's arms dropped to his sides.

"You're right," he answered. Bending down, he raised the poor, limp body from the dusty cobblestones. "It's no good talking. Just leave me alone now. Go on."

Jackdabos, overcome by the sight of this tough misanthrope in tears, remained staring till Barjavel drew him away.

"Meet us at the Arena to-night," was all that Barjavel said. "We'll wait for you by the *Rond Point* stairs."

The other nodded blindly.

"Your old lady," he called after them as they went, leaving him with his brindle burden in his arms, "your old lady speaks the truth altogether too well."

The Jackdaw and his leader exchanged a wondering look, and retreated in silence. They had not considered this mishap as a fulfillment of prophecy; yet here was a thing come to pass without delay, brutal, outdoor fact blundering on the heels of sick-room fancy.

"I never dreamed he was fond of that dog," said the Jackdaw, when they had rounded a corner out of sight.

"Men are queer," rejoined Barjavel. "Queer beasts we are. Let's go hurl the missiles a while, eh? We need some diversion."

They strolled toward the Avenue of the Aliscamps, accordingly, and spent that Sunday afternoon playing at bowls. In a pleasant, sunken grove near the barracks, they found a crowd of soldiers and loungers, as usual, rolling metal balls over the bare-beaten ground. Jackdabos, a champion at this sport, quickly became a centre of admiration, for he tossed the balls with that inimitable "back spin" which drops them dead on a given point. "Aha, the wizard," the holiday spectators began to murmur; "behold a player! Oh, marvel, he leaves it down as tidy as a poached egg." Soon two jealous infantrymen came forward and offered a challenge, so that the Jackdaw, with Barjavel as a calm and crafty partner, fought out a glorious foursome which made the tree-tops ring with its fame. The soldiers lost, but so stubbornly, so like a pair of good fellows, that when the game was done Barjavel treated them to an early dinner at the "True Sausage," where before sunset they quenched a well-earned thirst with white wine of St. Gilles.

"Magnificent! It is not every day!" cried the glowing warriors, when their bugle called them to rise and run home. "We played the best piece in the bag, didn't we? To our revenge!"

Bright moonlight transfigured Arles before the winners left their coffee and climbed upstairs toward

the Roman amphitheatre, there to wait for Puig, as they had appointed.

“Do you know,” said Barjavel, while they paced back and forth under the curving bulwark of shadow reared by the circus, “do you know, Jackdaw, what excellent company you are? Crabbed age and youth, and yet we make a spanking team together. I shall be sorry to lose you, little old chap, even during the short time when we—when we must separate.”

“Lose me? Separate?” echoed the youngster, halting in dismay. “Why should we?”

His colossal friend linked arms with him.

“Come, I’ll tell you why.”

As they paced onward together, a lonely form came slouching under the ruined arches, met them, passed, then wheeled abruptly, and joined them without more ado. It was Puig.

“I buried him,” croaked a weary voice, “but I still keep looking behind me and making up my mouth to whistle.”

The giant hooked his other arm through Puig’s, and bore him along in their thoughtful sentry-go. For a time no more was said. Jackdabos, warm with victory and good St. Gilles, felt pierced to the heart when he saw this dejected shadow walking beside them, still bereaved.

“Philibert,” continued Barjavel at last, “I was telling the Jackdaw why we shall part company. Do

you care to hear? It is like this. We're now much nearer to your gold plate." The shadow, arm-in-arm with them, remained passive and silent. "If our luck holds half as well as I expect, we shall discover a great thing; for now we know that Goiffon's map exists, it pictures the garden with the old orange trees, it hangs in a villa near Mentone. We'll take the night train south, to see that map. But, for my part, I can help no further."

He made them swing about and go tramping back along the *Rond Point*. Arch after arch, as they went, revealed a glimpse of the moonlit arena within, spacious, dreamily white, the ghost of Rome.

"I can help no further," said Barjavel again. "The map is in the Villa Pervinca, downstairs, near the front door. I can't—frankly, boys, I don't dare—show my face round some parts of the Riviera."

"Police? Ah, ah!" chuckled the Jackdaw, wisely. "Very well, then. You leave it all to me. I'll get the map out of that villa."

"You!" scoffed Puig. "Oh, you handsome boys can do anything. You say so with your own mouth, always."

The giant pressed them tighter by the elbows, and laughed in his beard.

"That villa," he said, "belongs to a Princess."

He named her, a Princess beyond cavil, by a name so great and lovely that it struck his companions

dumb. They stood peering up at him in the moonlight. Even the pert Jackdaw was abashed.

"Never mind," he bragged obstinately. "Princess or chambermaid, if you want your map, I'll get it out of a palace, or a jail, or a nunnery."

Barjavel patted him on the shoulder.

"Oh, youth!" he sighed. "How you talk! Forward, then. Let's see you get it, my young jewel of a thief."

Jackdabos, whipping his arm free, recoiled from that compliment.

"Look here, I'm no thief!" said he. "Don't go calling people——"

Barjavel quietly gathered him back into their triumvirate.

"Well, well," he drawled, with slow good humor. "Follow me, honest man; we'll watch what you *can* do."

They took the P. L. M. before midnight, and travelled southward in a rich, gray-padded compartment all their own, with a "Reserved" label gummed on the window. When Jackdaw first beheld this complete grandeur of the first-class railway carriage, and spied his own canvas bag, by some miracle, bulging overhead in the luggage net, he knew he never could sleep a wink that night. Long after his friends had curled on their noble cushions under the glow-worm green light of the covered ceiling-lamp, he sat

watching them—Puig, an old-clothes bundle of knees and elbows, Barjavel outstretched with legs abroad in Olympian comfort.

“What a wild project we’re chasing,” thought the youngster. Fantastic enough it seemed, as now, wrapped in strange costliness, they whirled through the night. “Wonder if I *can* get that map?”

Cross-legged, clasping his arms, knitting his brows, the Jackdaw sat like a plotting imp. Plan after plan he formed and rejected. See the map he must, in the Villa of a Princess; or be shown empty and vain-glorious to his companions. Sometimes he cooled his nose on the window-glass, to stare at the plain and the shadowy cypresses of the Crau revolving backward under the moonlight. More often he stared at Barjavel opposite, that calm front of Jove asleep.

“He’s fooling us, playing with us. Puig was right. How does he raise money for all this? What’s his little dodge?” Another question rose, and dwarfed the rest. “How did he know the map’s near the front door? The dark lady never said so.”

Working at this puzzle, and thinking himself wonderfully vigilant, he dropped asleep. It was daylight when he felt a violent shaking, and bounded into consciousness again with Puig’s hands on his shoulders.

“Wake up!” Puig’s voice commanded wrathfully. “Look alive, boy! What do you make of this, now?”

The train ran thundering along the coast of a bril-

liant sea. The right-hand windows framed a flying picture of gray limestone headlands, gray islets, and the Mediterranean glowing darkly in bay upon curved bay.

“What? Are we there?” stammered Jackdaw.

“Are we! Bah!” scoffed the other, with a final shake. “Are *we*? Yes, but how many of us?”

The cat-green eyes looked so brimful with tidings, and threw such a meaning glance round the compartment, that they roused Jackdabos to a sense of fact; and the fact was, in this padded box of luxury which roared and rattled along the *Côte d’Azur*, their company had dwindled.

Last night they were three; this morning, two. Barjavel had gone. An upholstered corner yawning where his large presence had reclined, showed no trace of Barjavel.

“Gone?”

“Do you think I carry him in my pocket?” howled Puig. “Of course he has gone! The Great Fat Thing, he got up and sneaked in the night. See what he left us.”

From a metal clip for reservation cards, the blacksmith snatched two bits of colored pasteboard—tickets, first class, for Mentone. Recovering his amazement, the Jackdaw examined them.

“*Y a du bon*,” he said. “They’re good, valid tickets, and Mentone is where we’re going.”

This calm and sensible conclusion drove Puig into a frenzy.

"You! You made me leave my tools behind at Aigo-Morto!" he raged. "Your old she-cripple put words on my dog that got him killed. Tools lost, dog dead and buried, this sacred Bulgarian ass of a Barjavel gone. Money, where is it? I am betrayed. And now, foul child, you sit there saying the tickets are good!"

The Jackdaw's temper rose by a few degrees.

"But Barjavel *told* you so beforehand!" he cried loyally. "He warned us that he would leave!"

"Infant of sluttishness!"

Hotly and loudly they wrangled, so that in the end their train carried them past Mentone. Providence and a sardonic guard ejected them, squabbling tooth and nail, at the station of Garavan. On that respectable, quiet platform, Jackdabos had the pleasure of putting a small but hard left fist compactly over the blacksmith's eyebrow, and knocking him into the station-master's favorite potted tree.

"Now," he said, during a sullen truce which followed, "I mean to go see where that Princess keeps her villa. You can come or not, as you like."

Puig rose gradually, scowling murder.

"Princess?" he mocked. "I throw your Princess to the cats!"

"That is your method of procedure," replied the

Jackdaw grandly. "For my part, I wish to find her map, also a gold plate. If I find them alone, so much the better for Barjy and me. I know what you are. You're a doubter."

He snapped his fingers, left the scandalized porters agape, and marched off shouldering his canvas bag, to leave it with a man of his acquaintance who made tourist majolica on the Gorbio road. This workman, a dark nondescript who called himself Italian, received the Jackdaw with a joyful noise, embraced him in the shop, and forced him to sit down under a back-yard trellis, where they ate and drank among fragments of colored statuary. When after much talk the Jackdaw departed, he had given the majolica man a brand new design (done with bread-crumbs at table), had refused a steady job of modelling other designs in clay, and had learned exactly where to find the villa of the Princess.

As he went, rejoicing in the mild, sunny prospect of the Gulf of Peace beyond rich men's housetops, he began to consider his position.

"Now you're alone," he thought, "and you've been boasting fearfully. Jackdabos, there's no more chance of seeing that garden map than of your flying to the moon; or seeing Her again—that girl with the white donkey. Ah, well!" He marched on doggedly, nevertheless, and climbed a road which rose winding among tile-capped villa walls toward a promontory

of dark pines. Below, at the foot of the Public Garden, a band played cheerful music. The sound floated through the golden afternoon air, so that presently he halted, listened, and looked back, afar off, to where on the curved rim of the bay, little white figures and colored parasols dotted the stone-girt promenade like a dribble of confetti. At this sight, a notion darted through his mind—a vague notion, then a hope, then a full-grown strategem that set him grinning at the landscape. “Good!” said he. His black eyes caught their old energetic fire. “Good boy! Got it! We’ll do the trick. Why, this being alone is pure luck, a God-send. I’d never get inside any Princess’s house with Puig tagging along. Lucky we fought when we did. Good riddance.”

With great alacrity he was turning to climb onward, when he spied in the walled road below, in the sunny lane of over-hanging greenery, a shabby little man toiling after him. The gait was familiar. A tired, lonely, disreputable wanderer, the man seemed to follow without hope, as the brindle dog used to follow. It was the dog’s master.

“Oh, the devil! There he comes!” thought the Jackdaw. “How can I saddle myself with an everlasting . . . Hang it, Puig would spoil the whole blessed show now.”

He started hurrying on; but conscience made each footfall heavy, and another backward glance undid

him. The sight of that disconsolate enemy was too much. His heart melted.

“Ah, bah!” he cried. “I can’t leave him out. But he does have such vile manners!”

Next moment he went running down hill, light-footed as a rabbit.

“Sorry I struck you, Puig-pig,” said he, as they met face to face on the hill-road. “You must allow for my temper, always. I’ve got a devilish bad disposition. No hard feeling, old boy?”

CHAPTER VI

HOW JACKDABOS BECAME A FATHER

THE smith was none too cordial.

"You almost got me nipped for that fight," he complained, glowering. "The chief said I broke his filthy tree, and called the police. I had to climb an iron-spiked fence."

And he exhibited his trousers, torn with triangular gaps, which disclosed a pair of hairy knees.

"Teach you to move faster," quoth Jackdabos. "Keep up with me, after this. Are you ready? Go."

"Where?" demanded the unreasonable Puig.

"To leave our cards on a Princess."

The Jackdaw set off at the word, climbing up hill again. Puig trudged along beside him, with nothing more to say but a bitter word now and then—"Open, shut. Penny a peep. Flip-flap. Cuckoo!"—when his kneecaps looked out of his trousers.

So, peace again restored, they left behind the outlying houses of the town, and entered the pine grove on the headland. Like Cap Martin, though smaller

and less worldly-wise in its landscape, the grove admitted here and there a vista of sea water, dark blue, shimmering through tangled rosemary and myrtle. Once they spied a keeper or liveried watchman roaming the wood, at sight of whom they squatted behind a rock. Once, in a sudden cross-way, they dodged the porter of some Russian noble, a romantic long-beard who wore the Georgian tunic shirred across the breast with blank-cartridge pockets, and who, vaguely hearing trespassers, looked roundabout, solemn as an eagle, but failed to see them when they darted past. The Jackdaw wriggled among the pine shadows like an Indian, without faltering or losing the line he seemed to follow.

“Here we are,” he said at last. “Pipe the villa.”

They scrambled down a bushy bank, tumbled into a hard, smooth road such as the wealthy love, and halted before a pseudo-rustic gate overhung with trained masses of blue periwinkle.

“Take it in,” murmured Jackdabos. “Quickly. Here’s where the Princess lives. Take it all in. Look? Front door straight ahead.”

The Villa Pervinca modestly confronted them across a pink gravel path, neatly brushed. A trim white house, roofed with pale-red tiles, it stood in a hill garden full of bright flowers that ran deeply down to the Ligurian Sea. Mimosas overhung it and rendered it commonplace. The front door was closed;

but sidelights flanking the door showed, by a glimmer of afternoon sunshine within, that the hallway or vestibule went clear through to westerly windows overlooking the water.

"Good fortune," murmured Jackdabos. "Couldn't be better. This house was fairly built for us, Puig."

He caught the smith's elbow and hauled him away from the gate.

"Back to town. Nobody saw us."

Puig struggled and hung behind.

"What you running away for?" he said. "We just came."

"But we know it all." The Jackdaw tugged him along. "We can go to work now. I understand all the rest."

Puig still came reluctantly, staring back over the garden hedge.

"Know all?" he cried. "Hanged if we know anything, you wild man."

Jackdabos released him, and, laughing, beckoned with one arm persuasively.

"Come, come! We know enough. I know this much: the villa's near the road, the Princess gets home from her drive at four o'clock, she's a childless woman, and I hear she's fond of children. Don't be caught loafing and staring over gates. We know plenty. Have a little faith!"

Nothing more would he disclose. They walked back

to town by the road, openly and without haste, pausing on a hill-top to watch the sunset flare crimson over Mont Agel, twilight sweep in like a mist from the bays, and the Dog's Head promontory become a bluish vapor, under which gradually twinkled the pale, wicked fireflies of Monte Carlo. That night they slept in a loft over a wheelwright's workshop, where the torrent Gorbio sounded peacefully beneath their windows.

Puig, early next morning, found his trousers mended as well as if the torn cloth had healed.

"Fairies have been at work here!" he swore, sitting on his cot and admiring both knees.

"I did it," confessed the Jackdaw, who came into the loft all aglow. He had been swimming before daylight in the gray-green mountain torrent. "That's a poor job," he explained, "because the candle flickered, but I used to work for a *stoppeur*."

"Good Lord!" said the smith. "You can do anything!"

"I believe you, my boy," replied Jackdabos, towel-ling his head.

The other stared at him.

"You're a puzzle. I can't understand you, Jackdaw. Now see, how can you wash all over in that cold stream?"

"Don't know," said Jackdabos frankly. "Must be the wild side of me." He wriggled into his

brown velveteens, then brushed them carefully, like a cat brushing his fur. "Look here, old Burn-the-Wind, will you help this wheelwright down below sweat a tire on? That will pay our lodging. Eh? Good man. I told him you would. Then meet me about two o'clock by Dr. Bennett's monument—you know, that silly English bust in the Partouneaux. Good-bye. I've got to find Hermance. This is my busy day."

He shot out of the room again, thundered downstairs, and went off whistling *Pedro's Mule* in the road.

"That boy's growing too uppish altogether," thought Puig. "Wonder if there's anything in him?"

Something there must have been, an idea, or a hope; for when the morning idlers were out in force, and strolling along the Midi where low waves gently broke to rattle the beach pebbles under the embankment, a limber youth in velveteen edged his way through to the donkey stand. Here, as always, a troop of dejected, philosophic asses waited in the glare, sleepily tilting their gray ears and hoping not to be hired. The chief donkey-woman, spare and merry, keen-eyed, swart as an Arab under her sun-bonnet, was quick to spy an old friend coming.

"Good day, Sara!"

"Ah, the little Jack!" she cried, her teeth flashing

in a grin. "My dear boy, are you come to break my old heart again?"

"Mother," said Jackdabos, beaming, "your heart is like Monte Carlo bank yonder, too full of gold to be broken. I only want your help."

"Son, if I were your mother in this body," retorted the woman, "I should bring you up to have better sense and more industry, like——" She waved her hand at the little concourse of donkeys—"these other children of mine."

They both laughed. Sara ignored a pompous blond Northerner who came fuming after donkeys to hire.

"And now," she demanded, when they had talked themselves out, "what help of mine do you want, sweetheart?"

"This," explained Jackdabos. "You know everybody. Has the little dancing girl on stilts come here this season?"

"Little Hermance? You'll find her near the Place d'Armes," answered Sara, without thinking twice. "Her mother sells watercolors at the bath-house all morning. They don't do the streets till afternoon."

The Jackdaw kissed Sara's leather-brown hand, while her customer fumed louder, and sputtered, and threatened.

"Mother, you're an institute of learning. Good on your head. Give this fat superman a mount he'll

remember, will you? A regular Kicking Dicky?"

"God bless you, kind gentleman. I will."

Thus it happened that by mid-afternoon Jackdabos and Puig once more were leaning over the pseudo-rustic gate of the Villa Pervinca. They were not sly, as on their former visit, but bold and noisy, the one playing a concertina fit to burst, the other singing "*Au Clair de la Lune*." Behind them, round and round the road, a little girl on stilts clattered and skipped and staggered, dancing to the music, now sedately, now with a pirouette that made her white petticoats fly blossoming like a ham-frill about her meagre legs. The song, the concertina, and the patter of her stilts outraged all the neighborhood with rowdy cheer.

"Don't forget, Hermance," murmured the Jackdaw, playing faster and faster, "when I say 'Flop,' down you go. You're taken very sick. I'm your father. Remember, you'll get *marrons glacés* and a piece of one hundred sous."

Hermance bounded on her stilts like a goat upon a house-top. She was a dirty, wiry, sunburnt witch of a girl, with vixen black eyes.

"Oh, Papa," she answered, whirling again, "I begin to suffer already. I feel that sunstroke coming which you promised."

"Heaven reward you, daughter," said Jackdabos. "Anybody come to the windows yet, Puig?"

The freckled singer, who strained his throat aloft, warbled a false tenor which made the pine-woods ring.

"No," he panted between verses. "Yes. In the sidelights by the door. One is watching us. An old man with whiskers."

"That is not the Princess," Jackdabos replied. "Look sharp. Continue, Hermance, my little der-vish."

And he pumped his wheezing instrument like a man whose soul flew on the wings of harmony.

"Ready," said Puig, his eyes fast on the villa door. "Old whiskers gone to report. Yes. Here they come. People moving in the vestibule. I see the skirts of a woman."

"Flop!" cried the Jackdaw.

It was well rehearsed and better played. Hermance let go her stilt-handles, clapped both fists to her frowsy black head, and with a quiet moan tumbled prostrate on the road. A critic might have thought this fall, so quick and startling, was too nearly perfect; but Puig and Jackdabos, far from being critical, ran to her with loud, compassionate cries. The concertina, left hanging by some inadvertence on the gate, collapsed and fell into the villa grounds.

"Oh, my poor child!" wailed Jackdabos. "I am a cruel father to thee! Stop laughing, Puig. Here

they come. Remember you're her uncle, and howl."

Puig, who now first saw the practical drift of things, fell into a maudlin state which outdid acting. He knelt beside the dancer and writhed. Down his freckled face ran tears.

"My niece!" he whooped and hiccupped. "Brother, you have murdered her!"

As they squatted lamenting in the road, with Hermance and her stilts between them, a face peered over the garden gate. It was a cold, agnostic face, with a Pecksniff collar and a bland throat showing between gray swallowtail whiskers. It took a very conservative view, then opened its lips and said:

"How did you come past the keeper?"

Jackdabos knew a major-domo when he saw one.

"Sir, don't scold us!" he begged, wringing his hands. "We are poor devils at our wits' end. My daughter—see!—while dancing, my own Hermance fell down in a sunstroke. Give us half a moment, sir, till we can carry her away."

"Open the gate," said a quiet voice.

The major-domo withdrew his head; the gate swung open; and there, advancing toward them, came the Princess. Tall, slight, straight as a wand, bare-headed and plainly dressed in white, she stepped from her garden and looked down at that gaudy bundle, that sham sufferer lying on the road. Jackdabos met her eyes, dark, sorrowful eyes that looked him

through calmly and put to shame his knowledge of the world. She was neither young nor old, but a woman of ageless beauty, though the black hair curving from her temples was faintly touched with a silver frost which became her like a diadem.

"Bring your child indoors," she commanded.

They obeyed. Jackdabos lifted the little fraud in his arms, and carried her, Puig following, through a flower-bordered path to the villa. While they went, the major-domo, like a faithful servant, undertoned some remonstrance: "I think they are internationals. . . ."

The Jackdaw heard that warning, and flared at once.

"Madam, we are *not* thieves!" he cried.

The Princess turned on her threshold, and, smiling, beckoned him to enter.

"I believe you, sir," she replied, so lightly that he felt rebuked for brawling.

Next moment they were in a pleasant hall-way, which looked through open windows, a veranda, and tree-tops beyond, down a hill-garden to the bright western sea. Books and vases of flowers filled the room, with here and there a few small pictures.

"Lay the child down," said the Princess, pausing by a chintz-covered couch. "We'll find something to restore her."

With a sign to her major-domo, she passed into

an adjoining room. He followed, but looked back more than doubtfully at Puig, the Jackdaw, and their little acrobat lying asprawl on the couch. He disappeared, however, and left them alone.

"Where is it? Where is it?" whispered the smith, grinning, elated. "Where's the map? Jump lively!"

Jackdabos turned his head away.

"I thought she'd be fat and purse-proud," he declared. "I'm ashamed. Rather than lie to her, a man would throw his tongue to the cats. I'm ashamed. Here's the picture of Goiffon's garden."

He stood looking dolefully at a small, framed water-color, which hung beside the mantelpiece. Delicately tinted, and drawn after the picture-book fashion of some old explorer's chart, it showed in droll perspective a house and a walled garden full of orange trees, a fish-pond, an arbor, a bit of crumbled monument or ruin. Puig darted across the room to join him in studying this long-desired landscape. Beyond any chance of error, they had found it. A scroll drawn at the foot of the picture contained the words: "*Hic habitant Goiffones.*"

"Take it! Take it!" hissed Puig.

The Jackdaw remained motionless.

"I won't," he said.

"You don't dare," mocked the other.

"Dare?" Jackdabos roared and roused like a young lion. "Me? Dare?"

With what seemed two jerks, quicker than light, he snatched the picture from the wall, stuffed it under his velveteen jacket, then whipped it out and hung it once more, straight and true, upon its hook. The thing vanished and reappeared like a flying shadow, like a miracle.

“Don’t talk dare to me.”

“Oh,” sighed Puig, gaping round-eyed at this perfect piece of legerdemain. “Why didn’t you keep it? Too late now. . . .”

He sidled awkwardly in front of the picture, just as the Princess returned, with a bottle of lavender salts in her hand. The major-domo sullenly followed, bringing a tray filled with various restoratives. Jack-dabos ran to join them by the couch, where little Hermance lay still as death. Puig stayed by his mantelpiece.

“Poor girl!” said the Princess, kneeling and going quietly to work. “Poor, tired child.”

The dirty, sunburnt face of Hermance began to wrinkle, and her nose to twitch above the lavender bottle. She worked nobly to earn five francs and a box of sweetmeats, but nature her custom held. Hermance gave a violent sneeze, and came to life.

“Oh, Monsieur,” she blubbered, winking genuine tears from her black eyes, “I could not help it!”

After this, the restoration was rapid and complete.

"Don't scold her," said the Princess, looking up at Jackdabos.

"Have no fear, Madam," the young man sadly promised. "It was all my fault."

He gathered the grimy convalescent to his bosom, and carrying her so, bowed, stared at Puig meaningly, and jerked his head toward the door. All the clever story he had prepared, of wandering, poverty, heat, and privation, flew out of his mind like the vulgar chaff it was.

"We're indebted to your great kindness. . And I am—ashamed."

The Princess rose and watched him depart, without seeing the many queer obeisances made by Puig, who followed him.

"Take better care of her," called the Princess.

"I will," replied Jackdabos, turning in the doorway with a strange smile, the smile of a defeated angel.

They went out into the sunlight, crossed the garden path, picked up the fallen concertina, shouldered the stilts, and tramped away down the road among pines and carob trees. The Jackdaw went oblivious, carrying Hermance in his arms as if she really had been ill. When they had rounded two curves of the road, Puig laughed.

"Well," he said, grounding the stilts, "that wasn't so bad, old boy. You're not the only Presto

Change-oh. While you were talking, I scratched my back on the fireplace, and—got it after all.”

The smith pulled from under his coat-tail a small framed water-color.

“What? You stole it?”

Jackdabos carefully set the little girl down on her feet. He grew pale.

“You took that map?” he cried; then added very mildly: “No doubt you meant well, Puig, but you have destroyed my honor. Give me that!”

He snatched the map out of Puig’s hand, thrust him staggering back among the roadside myrtles, turned like a man fleeing from disaster, and at full speed ran toward the villa gate.

CHAPTER VII

THE MAP AND THE PLACE

At the villa gate he ceased running, but only for a moment, while he hid behind a glossy hanging mass of periwinkle and stuffed Goiffon's picture under his jacket. Then he raced through the garden to the Princess's door.

Even after he had knocked, Jackdabos could invent no excuse.

"How," he thought, fingering the edges of the picture-frame in his bosom, "how shall I pop this back on the wall? Heavens, what a mess!"

He was cursing Puig's perfidy, when the door opened and the major-domo stared blandly out.

"You again?" said this mild-whiskered Cerberus. "We are to bathe *your* forehead now, perhaps?"

"Sir," cried the Jackdaw, "let me in, I beg. One instant. I must see your mistress."

Unmoved, the honey-tongued old stoic swung his door to.

"And I," he drawled, "must deprive her of that pleasure."

Jackdabos, exalted by despair, flung himself edge-wise between door and jamb. A hot struggle followed. He fought at a disadvantage, being bound not to crack the glass of the picture under his coat. Youth at last prevailed. He burst into the room.

"*Apache!*" panted the old man. "In broad daylight? We shall see, we shall see!"

He staggered back, waving his arms over his venerable head, then turned to run for assistance. At that moment, however, through one of the veranda windows the Princess came into the room—a white figure carrying a handful of fresh gladioli.

"What is here?" she asked, not even showing surprise. Both men regarded her like fools caught in their folly. She waved the major-domo aside with her sword-like flowers. "Go calm yourself," she advised; then, when he had gone grumbling out, she turned to Jackdabos: "You had forgotten something?"

Jackdabos bowed. The mere sight of this lady, so beautiful, sad, and strong, restored him like magic. He stood upright. His dark face glowed. All would yet come right. Even while he thought so, he perceived in a flash his only possible line of conduct, and took it.

"I came to beg your forgiveness," he declared, smiling. "I'm no good. But I'm sorry."

He reached down into a deep pocket, from which

he brought a dirty buckskin pouch containing his little weight of money. It was not money he produced from this pouch, but something he valued far more.

"The only good thing I ever made," he explained, holding it out to her. "Please take it. If you forgive me, Madam, you will keep this."

The Princess laid the bright gladioli on a chair, and took in her slender fingers what he offered—a tiny brooch of wrought silver.

"Oh!" she exclaimed with delight. "Our dear cigala?"

She carried it to the windows, where the sunshine made it glitter in her palm. Jackdabos had spoken truly. His best piece of work, which he could never bear to sell even when hungry, it was a silver cigala, the shrill-chirping minstrel of Provence.

"Whether she keeps it or not," he told himself, as he backed quietly toward the fireplace, and gripped the picture-frame under his coat, "she can't help looking at it. The thing is too fine."

He was right. It was no common trinket made for catch-penny trade. The Princess bent her lovely head down to a thing worth seeing. As she did so, the Jackdaw made a lightning pass behind him, then moved carelessly away from the mantel. Goiffon's picture hung once more on its accustomed hook.

"But this is charming," said the Princess.

"Then it's worth your keeping?" he begged.

She glanced at him quickly, and saw that he was not only in earnest, but in a seventh heaven of pride. She raised the little silver insect and pinned it among the white stuff below her throat. Light from the sea garden sparkled on it.

"The sun makes me to sing." She quoted in Provençal the motto of the cigala. "I wear your decoration."

Jackdabos went backward, bowing, till he reached the open door.

"May the sun never set in your heart!" he cried, with such ardor and faith as would move mountains, not to say a woman. "You have made one poor devil happy."

To his great wonder, the Princess followed him swiftly as far as her door.

"What?" she said, looking down reproachfully at him in the path. "You, a poor devil? And you can make things like this?" She tapped the silver cigala at her throat. "For shame! Go work, and work hard. Are you the kind that buries his talent in a napkin?"

The brown rascal smiled at her, but ruefully. Outside the house he seemed another creature.

"There's the trouble," he said. "I can't stay indoors long enough to work. 'The sun makes *me* to sing.'"

He ran up the garden path, turned at the gate, bowed again, and vanished. His clear voice resounded from the road:

“ ‘A poor little chap, it fell to his lot,
Et lon la laire,
Et lon lan la,
A poor little chap, it fell to his lot
To worship her who loved him not.

“ ‘She said to him: “Lay at my feet,”
Et lon la laire,
Et lon lan la,
She said to him: “Lay at my feet
Your mother’s heart for my dog to eat.”

“ ‘Went to his mother and killed her dead,
Et lon la laire. . . ’ ”

The song, a corrupt version of Richepin’s *Marie-des-Anges*, dwindled in the distance among the sunlit greenery.

“ ‘The heart said, weeping, low and mild,
Et lon la laire,
Et lon lan la,
The heart said, weeping, low and mild,
“Hast thou hurt thyself, my child?” ’ ”

The Princess leaned in her doorway and listened until song and running feet became inaudible. The sun lay bright among the flowers, and her garden seemed narrower than before.

As for Jackdabos, he came racing round that curve of the woodland road where Puig and Hermance awaited him. They sat under a myrtle bank, but slid down afoot when the Jackdaw appeared.

"Wild man," called Puig sternly, holding one stilt ready as a club, "wild man, answer me. What have you done?"

Jackdabos laughed, wrested the weapon from his hands, and gave it to the girl.

"Little pitchers," he observed. "Hermance, dear, run play by the shore. We'll call you when it's time to go buy sweetmeats."

The tumbling-girl grinned, and trotted off down the road.

"I hung the lady's map where it belongs," continued Jackdabos. "That's all. Our honor is patched up."

"Honor?" raged Puig. "Bah, ditched! We're ditched! Lost our map after all this trouble."

"Sit down." The Jackdaw pushed him—gently, this time—against the bank. "We need not turn barbarian. I have the map."

"Eh!" shouted Puig. "Where?"

Jackdabos maintained a calm superiority.

"In my head," he replied. "A little study is better than much thieving. Before you stole that picture, I knew it by heart. Observe." Breaking a myrtle spray, he scratched with its point a rough oblong on the road. "That's Goiffon's garden." Inside the oblong he drew noughts and crosses, quickly, accurately, with decision. "Don't you see? There"—he pointed—"was the westernmost orange tree toward the northwest corner. Two metres from that, somebody buried our gold plate. Well! Your cornermost orange grew directly from under a ruin by the wall—from the western edge of the ruin. There, I draw it so. And it was a Roman ruin."

Puig snorted.

"Roman? What if it was? You're an ass."

The Jackdaw placidly buttonholed him, and said:

"Orange trees may be cut down, old man; but Goiffon, or the successor of Goiffon, does not destroy a Roman ruin in his own garden. No, sir: not to please your grandmother. We have good solid Roman masonry to measure from."

Puig stared hard and long at the scratches in the dirt.

"Damme if I don't begin to think," he said grudgingly, "that you have something inside that little round nut of yours, after all. Let's go find this garden."

They found it, late on the next Saturday after-

noon. Goiffon's name still lingered in that neighborhood, for they followed his memory, asking Ligurian workmen here and there, until it led them out of France, across the torrent Saint Louis, high on a limestone spur into Italy. Gray stone walls, the labor of centuries, terraced a mountain gorge where violets grew thickly under the moonlight-colored leaves of ancient olive boughs, and where on every eminence the air tasted fresh and lively, scented with green heather. A swarthy, bright-eyed hillman, cutting roots for briar pipe-bowls, looked up from his fragrant work at the Jackdaw's hail, and welcomed the Jackdaw as a brother.

"There stands the house you're looking for," he said, pointing. "Goiffon died. Yes, he was a painter, and a man who went round talking friendly like you and me. One of these rich fly-by-nights owns the poor old building now, they say. You're welcome, dear soul."

Through an olive grove they approached the house at sunset. It was a pink stucco villa rearing its second storey above a high gray stucco wall, and looking down over Mortola to the sea. Faded green shutters flung wide, and white curtains fluttering slowly, showed that the upper windows all stood open to the evening air. Puig and the Jackdaw squatted in an old grassy trench, well within the boundary of the grove, where they could spy out the land in safety.

So near the object of their search, both men hung back and doubted.

"We sha'n't find anything," said one.

"Not likely," agreed the other.

Yet, having devoured the sight of this hillside dwelling, their eyes danced and glittered when they met again.

"Don't lose time," Jackdabos implored.

Puig nodded, stood up, hitched his belt closer, and set off walking through the grove. He, by agreement, was the one who should put their plot in motion, and deliver the attack: he was to appear at the house boldly as a gardener seeking work, an honest poor man from Roquebrune whose asparagus had failed, and who wanted any odd job to earn victuals by. Deliberate, burly, determined, with a trowel stuck in his pocket, Puig looked the part as he swaggered off among the gnarled olive trunks and their attenuated sunset shadows. He gained the open ground, crossed it, plunging through heather, and disappeared round a corner of the garden wall.

Jackdabos, chin to the ground, lay prone in a bed of violets, watching their numberless tops quiver between sunlight and dusk. He listened. There came no sound whatever: no knocking at any gate, no clink of any latch, no murmur of voices. Time dragged by.

"What's the man doing?" he began to wonder.

With his nose among the violets, he drew a long

breath of fragrance. It was pleasant to watch them thus from underneath, to see their little shepherd-crook stems gilded by a shaft of sunset, to think how their trembling tops resembled dark blue winged creatures ready to fly. A fancy of his childhood recurred: lying so, his eyes level with the good earth, he had often pretended he was a fairy, no bigger than an ant, wandering valiantly through the tall green forest of the grass. His mind could still enjoy that game, still run free into Lilliput.

"How easy all pleasure is, the real fun!" he chuckled. "Why do people hurry after it and fret? It comes to you waiting. You can't go catch it."

The sun went down: and with it vanished every glowing color from his violet forest, the ruddiness died off the gray olive trunks, Goiffon's house grew pale and indistinct, the sea below turned vaporous and lost all lines of movement. A smoke-white moon hung above the mist. Jackdabos roused on his elbows, like a brown Puck listening in the woods. Nightfall and its chill overtook him, the treacherous *fond de l'air* of the Riviera made him shiver.

"Where the dickens has Puig gone?"

Not a sound came from the house. Had he performed his duty, there must have come many sounds.

"Has he dropped dead, then?"

The Jackdaw sat up, shivering, and wrapped his old velveteen jacket more snugly about him. The

grove had become too cold a floor to lie on. He leaned his back against an olive bole.

“Puig’s had time enough to shovel up that plate and run with it from here to Genoa. But, of course, he wouldn’t.”

Such faith brought its reward. The garden wall showed a mere ghostly blank through the trees, when from beyond it came a thud of galloping feet. The runner, a shadow, burst into the grove.

The time of day was now, as the saying is, between dog and wolf. Twilight so darkened the grove that Jackdabos could not see the lineaments of this man who darted toward his hiding-place. It was Puig, by the voice, and Puig in a strange fit of excitement.

“Jack, Jackdaw; where are you? Come here! This is too much for me. Something’s gone wrong. What’s the matter with that house?”

Jackdabos jumped, caught the speaker by his arm, and stayed him as he went blundering past. The arm held a trowel straight up like a weapon ready for defense.

“Man alive!” cried Puig, stopping short. “Jackdabos, tell me, quick, what’s the matter with that house?”

CHAPTER VIII

GOIFFON'S GARDEN

THEY stooped forward, peering under the low-spread blackness of the grove.

"Matter?" returned Jackdabos. "Why, what should be?"

Puig drew himself together palpably in the dusk. Not fear, but some kindred emotion, some panic of surprise had overcome him.

"A trap," he whispered. "It's a trap. The back gate stood ajar. I went in, walked through the garden, looking. Nobody there, Jacko: either that house has got a murder inside, or it's baited to catch us. Doors and windows wide open. Walk in, help yourself." He shook the Jackdaw, hissing vehemently. "Not a soul there!"

Jackdabos refused to catch his alarm.

"All the better for spade-work, Puig. *Y a du bon!* Sounds too good to be true; but keep your eyes peeled, and in we go!"

Puig remained bent under the olive boughs, hearkening and staring.

"I'm not easy upset," he grumbled. "But wide open—ready to swallow you—house and garden! That ain't luck, don't tell me. Too good? You bet your breeches. Coming dark, and not a soul. That garden's fair set like a rat-trap."

His doubt infected the Jackdaw, but only for a moment. Then the youngster caught him by the hand, and led him, like an unwilling child, forward among the olive trees. Outside the grove they halted under an evening sky of which the brightness puzzled them, until they saw, high above the veiled sea, the moon turning faintly golden. The heather smelled cool and sweet as they breasted its dark tops and broke through. Crossing a donkey-path, they reached the glimmering wall, turned its corner up-hill, and so slipped along its darkest face. Here, suddenly, a band of moonlight fell athwart their way, through the back gate.

"Open," said Puig. "Wide open."

"So I see," quoth Jackdabos: "Pop in."

Next moment they stood together in Goiffon's garden. So carefully and slowly had they come, that already the moon shone clear and bright. Revealing the blue of the sky where it hung, it flooded this walled enclosure with such radiance as made every flower distinct in the masses of bloom. The trees,

young lemon-trees formally planted, glistened as though their leaves were glass and their fruit the treasure of the Hesperides. Serene light, long shadows, immobility, a trance of quiet, rendered the whole place fabulous.

"We stepped into a dream," said Jackdabos.

"Hush!" whispered Puig, listening for a sound which did not come.

He beckoned. The pair moved on warily, treading a moonlit carpet of fine turf. Wherever the path wound across their course, they skipped it as though skipping a brook. Once the Jackdaw knelt down to scrutinize this path.

"The sand," he whispered, rising again, "was brushed to-day. Some one lives here."

"A thing to beat that," promised his companion. "Come, look."

Through the shadows of the glistening lemon-trees they stole, past a little circular fish-pond that contained a deep, cold likeness of the moon, then up three stone steps to a flowery terrace. The house, bleached with pale light, overgrown with a black arabesque of vine-leaves and tendrils, yawned open before the marauders—a row of doors and high windows, all open, dark, and empty. A trellised way like a tunnel, on the right, showed at the end of its vista another gate, the front gate of the garden, wide open on a mountain road.

"Look," said Puig, drawing the Jackdaw with him to the main door of the house. "Don't *seem* right. Can't *be* right."

Indoors they saw a long, low chamber, half-lighted by the greenish mist pouring aslant through many windows. Gilt picture-frames, the curves of a piano, corrugated ranks of morocco along bookshelves, caught threads and points of light which rendered them half familiar, half ghostly. Into the brightest window jutted and shone the corner of a mahogany table, on which stood, lonely and brilliant, a huge silver pitcher.

"You're right," said Jackdabos. "It's queer."

After a moment of watching, he added:

"That's a bell there? Ring it."

A brass knob gleamed at the edge of the doorway vines. Puig gave it a vigorous pull, which was loudly answered, somewhere within, by the jangling of a bell. Gradually this clangor died away. It brought no one, roused no movement, produced no change but an apparent deepening of the silence.

"Bah!" cried Jackdabos aloud. "These Pierrots here, they are very mysterious! Holà! Madam! Sir! If you please . . ."

His voice rang in the deserted room.

"It's no good," declared Puig.

Jackdabos put his fancy to work.

"Perhaps," he said, "the owner has killed himself, and the servants done a flit."

"Yes," mocked the other. "And left that silver hogshead for us on the table."

Jackdabos nodded, acknowledging the argument.

"Why not?" propounded the smith suddenly. "Here's a house full of stuff, admission free. That's better than gold plates which may not exist. Shall we have a go at it? Inside? Come, these people deserve to lose . . ."

The Jackdaw stared at his tempter.

"O Puig," he mourned. "My dear Puig, if we were only thieves, now! What a chance! If we were minions of the moon."

"Thieves anyhow," said Puig. "Indoors or out."

"I'm no casuist, I'm only a digger."

So saying, the Jackdaw snapped his fingers, and broke off a spell.

"Back out!" he ordered. "Back! This is no time to be poets. Along with me, old Burn-the-Wind, and thank the good fortune however it comes."

He swept a farcical bow into the room, then turned and ran down the terrace, through the lemon trees, to the rear wall of the garden. Here, busy as a terrier, he darted back and forth, his shadow bobbing on the grass; till suddenly he found what he wanted, and motioned the waiting Puig to draw nearer.

"Roman ruin," he whispered. "Where's your tape-measure?"

A row of shrubs and climbing flowers lined this

wall, mingled with ivy here and there, now thick, now sparse. Out from the thickest ivy, in the darkest shadow, protruded the crumbling edges of a vaulted arch, built—as the men saw when they struck a match—of long, thin Roman bricks. Some rich man caused it to be built, before Pliny wrote his letters; and still the Roman mortar held as hard as flint.

“Here,” answered Puig, rummaging his pockets for a cheap cloth-measure bought yesterday.

“Roll off two metres,” commanded the Jackdaw, squatting in darkness. “Give me the end. Now draw a circle with your trowel, as far as two metres will stretch.”

Puig obeyed, and with his trowel-point scratched a curve along the ground, a goodly arc of a circle, which had for centre the Jackdaw's thumb, tight-pressed against the corner of the ruin. This arc ran from wall and shrubbery, across the bright gray path, into the midmost gloom of the vault. No sooner was the curve drawn, than up sprang Jackdabos to cut a fantastic caper, dancing, flinging his legs over the moonlit turf. He leaped and spun like a goblin.

“Ah, the good luck!” Returning, he clapped Puig on the shoulder. “Your circle, dear old boy, your circle of two metres radius from where the orange tree grew—see! It cuts the path. Of course! That man who hid our plate, he was no imbecile. Of course it

cuts the path; for nobody digs up a path, my child! Eh? Nobody but us, to-night!"

He suppressed the beginning of a war whoop, caught Puig round the waist, spilled him on the grass, rolled him over and over in a wrestling match. Puig fought and gurgled. At last they sat up, stared at each other, and regained their senses.

"Wait till I get my weapon," panted the Jackdaw.

He drew from his hip-pocket another gardener's trowel, Puig seized his own from where it had fallen, and both men, kneeling on the path, began to dig like badgers.

The top crust of the path, under its powder of neat sand, proved to be sharp rocks tamped hard as frozen ground. Their trowels clinked while they broke it. Once below this obstacle, they scooped out the native hill-side earth with ease, but so fast that they panted and grew hot in the chill evening air. At last the hole grew elbow-deep, wider than a grave and half as long, with a conical mound of loam casting black shadow into it. Now and again the men ceased digging, to lower a lighted match within the pit, but the flame showed only roots and a few angleworms.

"Heavens!" cried Puig all at once, and jumped backward over the mound, ready to run.

The ivy covering the ruin parted, rustling. It was a night bird which passed overhead—a young owl

which went fluttering round the garden from tree to tree, squeaking like a deserted puppy.

Jackdabos uttered some curse, and plied his trowel more furiously than ever.

"Boys-oh!" he muttered, soon afterward. "We've struck it! I feel the thing. Put your hand down."

Puig launched himself head and shoulders into the pit. His fingers met the Jackdaw's there, and together they explored by sense of touch a hard, knobby thing protruding near the bottom.

"Root again," said Puig. "No. A stone?"

It was neither, for amid the mould their fingers rasped and tore a bit of rotten cloth.

"Have got!" grunted Jackdabos. "Dig, brothers, dig!"

His cheeks, in the moonlight, shone with running sweat.

"Dig!" he cried aloud.

They bent into the hole, clawing and cutting each other with their trowels. Presently the bank of the little pit crumbled and caved. The mouldy knob had become a stratum, a curving edge. They caught this edge and hauled. It yielded, stuck, played loose, then came suddenly away with a shower of clods, and landed between them as they rolled on the turf, legs to the moon.

It was a flat, heavy object like an oval shield, coated and caked with mud.

They dropped it, and for a moment sat looking solemnly back and forth, up and down, from this dirty treasure to the triumph which their eyes proclaimed.

"Old Philibert," stammered Jackdabos, "I really believe . . ."

The smith nodded, breathless and speechless.

"Child," he puffed at last, "you're not such a fool as you look."

They hitched themselves lamely up from sitting to standing. It was Puig who lifted the muddy shield from the grass.

"Let's be off," said he. "Somebody may come."

"No," Jackdabos replied, shaking his head. "Open the bundle first. May not be what we wanted."

"Good words," Puig admitted. He held their flat prize toward the moon, and with his trowel scraped off the thickest mould, like a cook trimming a pie. "We can't afford mistakes now."

He had drawn his pocket-knife to cut the rotten wrappings, when Jackdabos gave a jump and tapped him on the shoulder.

"I heard feet walking. Look sharp. Out we go—the back gate."

Puig shut his knife, dropped his trowel quietly on the mound of loam, and tucked the shield-shaped parcel under his arm. Both men stared cautiously round the garden. Nothing moved among the fat shadows of the lemon trees. Even the frightened

owlet had taken shelter under those glossy leaves, and squeaked no more complaints to the moon.

"Your ears are sharper than mine," Puig whispered.

He stole away, crouching, along the grassy border of the wall. Jackdabos followed, on tiptoe, listening. They strung up their sinews for a dash into the heather. Then, reaching the gate, they paused and regarded each other blankly.

The garden gate was shut. Where they had entered so free, a heavy iron-studded door now barred the exit.

"Wind." Puig's thick lips formed words of explanation in the moonlight. "The wind blew it shut."

He tried the latch, carefully, with the ease of a good mechanic who knows locks and fastenings. The door held. Puig shoved it, humored it, silently pushed and lifted.

"Fastened," said his pouting lips. "Locked from outside."

"There wasn't any wind," mouthed Jackdabos. "I heard somebody there."

They instantly withdrew, and began studying the wall for an escalade; but the wall reared everywhere smooth and high, crowned with bright little fangs of bottle-glass thickly planted in cement. To cling there, moreover, was to hoist one's body upon the most con-

spicuous ledge of all that neighborhood, and into the clearest light.

Puig darted once more to the back gate, vainly struggled with the latch, and made a hopeless gesture.

"*I told you,*" he whispered, returning. "*I told you it was a trap.*"

The Jackdaw grew hot with anger.

"Baby!" he retorted, at the top of his voice. "Cat of discouragement, you drag your tail in the sand always, and now! Every house has a front gate, I believe? Pull your feet!"

They started with a bound, and ran under the lemon trees, past the cool, golden fish-pond, up the terrace, and along the shadowy tunnel of the grape trellis, which led toward the front wall, the seaward gate of Goiffon's garden.

But here, even while they ran, they found that running would not avail now. The front gate also had been closed, but something worse was in act to happen. Puig had guessed only too well, and this garden of the Hesperides caught them. The trap was sprung.

CHAPTER IX

MAN-TRAPS

THEY recoiled not a moment too soon, half-way down the leafy tunnel. Before them the front gate silently swung ajar, then opened inward, to show a tall man blocking the way.

Puig and Jackdabos flattened themselves among vines.

For a moment this man stood peering as though he saw them eye to eye; but he could not have done so, for under the trellis lay tangles of black and white obscurity too thick and deceptive. He paused, holding the latch. The gateway framed a magical picture of three distances and depths—a white road, low olive tops fringing the mountain spur, and beyond these a pale moonshine vapor which dissolved both sea and sky.

The stranger, holding the latch at arm's length, turned his head, raised his free hand, and beckoned somebody without. His bosom flashed white as he moved. Three burly silhouettes filled the road—

Italian police, with admirals' hats and carbines, like figures conjured from *La Tosca*. The tall man in the gate consulted them, whispering.

If the trap had sprung, it was not tamely to catch mice. No sooner did the stranger turn his face away, than Puig and the Jackdaw began sliding back from pillar to vine, from vine to pillar, quiet as a pair of black spirits.

"Garden too bright," breathed one. "Into the house. Hide in a cupboard, or else . . ."

"Fight 'em," whispered the other.

They slipped under a spiny, low-hanging palm, and thence to the house door where formerly they had rung the bell and shouted. Now they backed slowly into the room, hearing a crunch of heavy boots approach under the trellis.

"Caught?" sighed Puig.

His young companion said nothing, but gave a glance behind, then suddenly pinched his elbow. Puig turned, and saw what the Jackdaw had just seen. The long chamber, this time, was not empty.

At the table where the silver pitcher gleamed, sat a man. A large man, sprawling at length in a high, mediaeval chair, he sat with his back toward them, and pensively regarded the moonlight through a window. While they watched him, he roused, but without turning, and listened to the footsteps outdoors. Then he reached for his pitcher. There stood

a glass ready to hand, but he lifted the great silver weight like a trifle and drank from it magnificently.

"Lazy beggar!" said Jackdabos under his breath. He laughed silently, despair of their own case rendering him light-hearted. "Lazy devil! That's *pukka!* That's the kind of rich man to be."

The heavy boots came scuffing the garden stairs, directly up the terrace, to the house. Puig, with his long bundle under his armpit, looked wildly about the room, then slid into a corner of the bookcases. Jackdabos promptly ranged himself alongside. They waited there, among the darkest moonlight glimmerings, ready to give battle or run.

"Hallo, old man," hailed an English voice from the door, cheerful and friendly. "I did my part. If anyone's prowling round your garden to-night, we've bottled him."

A tall shape entered the room—a shape who bore the long, white bosom of evening dress.

"Bring your men up, Alfredo," it continued affably. "I thought I saw our gentry come sneaking this way."

The three carbineers crowded the door with their admirals' hats. As they did so, the man at the table plumped down his silver jug, and smacked his lips.

"Oh, water! Fountain of health!" he exclaimed, in a hearty, familiar barytone. "I do love to come

home to this Alpine spring of mine. If 'twas only wicked to drink water, how fine it would be! Good evening, neighbor. Switch the lamp on, will you, please?"

The click of an electric button answered these words. At once the dream-like mist in the room became an aching glare, a flood of common light. Jackdabos and Puig, night-birds penned in a corner, stood blinking.

"Here they are. I thought so," declared the tall man in evening clothes. He was a lean Englishman, gray-haired, not young, not old, whose long, delicate, beardless face and smiling gray eyes turned on the wrong-doers with neither malice nor mercy. "Here they are, and a naughty pair, too. Shall we tackle 'em? Do you want a row in here?"

He spoke to the man in the high-backed, mediaeval chair, who lazily began to rise. The three policemen stolidly blocked the door. Puig showed his teeth like a rat, and seemed doubtful whether to draw the knife from his hip, or yield. Jackdabos, crossing his arms, looked on.

"No, I hate rows," yawned the water-drinker, standing up and shoving his chair away. "No, Alfredo, not to-night; it was a mistake. A great mistake. These two gentlemen are friends of mine whom I expected."

He faced them while he spoke,—a slow, amiable, black-bearded giant.

It was Barjavel.

A moment of stupefaction followed. Then Puig hurled his flat bundle clattering on the floor.

“Singed!” he cried. “Burnt and betrayed. You played us for fools. Damn the rich, anyhow!”

But Jackdabos bent double and laughed himself into a spasm of coughing.

“You old Assyrian bull!” he whooped. “You simply came here and waited for us! I have seen farces in my day . . .”

He ran, caught Barjavel by the shoulders, and shook him, transported with delight. Barjavel smiled like the father of a prodigal son.

“If you,” said he, addressing the policemen over the Jackdaw’s head, “will go shout for René at the back gate, he will furnish you, my friends, with a little supper. René is the cook, and a remarkably good one.”

The three carbineers touched their great hats, and filed outdoors. Alfredo, their leader, a roly-poly Ventimiglian with huge mustaches, winked solemnly at Jackdabos as he went. The wink was returned.

“He arrested me once,” the Jackdaw explained.

“It does him honor,” said Barjavel, lightly embracing and releasing the Jackdaw. “And now,” he continued, with a gesture of welcome, “let’s be com-

fortable. Won't you light the fire, my son? The room has grown chilly."

He went about closing windows and glass doors, drawing curtains, placing chairs round the table. Jackdabos knelt on the hearth, and skilfully lighted a fire of *boulets*. The gray-haired Englishman, like one who knew the ways of that house, fetched a tall, many-branched silver candlestick and set it by Barjavel's chair.

"Switch off?" said he.

"Please. I loathe electricity," replied Barjavel.

A moment later they were ready to sit down by pleasant candle-light. Only Puig hung aloof, and glowered, and sulked.

"What!" cried the friendly giant. "Puig, man, you thought me a traitor? Nonsense, never. Join us. The police merely came to see that the wrong persons didn't walk off with this house. They've gone—drinking in the kitchen by now. Come, your chair. What luck?"

"We got it," grinned the Jackdaw.

Puig emitted a grunt, stooped, took from the floor his muddy prize, stalked across with it, flung it on the table and himself into a chair.

"We got something," he amended, sceptically. His green eyes surveyed the room with envious contempt, and seemed to find a personal affront in the English-

man's clean linen. "Open it if you want to. I've been made a fool plenty long enough."

Jackdabos, radiant, whipped out his pen-knife.

"Shall I?" he asked, reaching for the mouldy bundle on the mahogany.

"Wait. Hold on," commanded Puig morosely. "I thought our secret lay among three. Who's your fourth?"

The Englishman calmly began shoving his chair away.

"I'll trot home if you like," he offered.

Barjavel stayed him with a glance.

"Puig's better than his manners," stated the giant. "His question is a fair question. I'll answer it. Boys, this gentleman knows more about bronze, gold, and silver, ancient or modern, than any other person alive. His opinion will be worth having, in case we can show him anything fit for consideration."

The gray-haired stranger leaned forward and lighted a cigarette amid the little forest of candles.

"Handsome of you," he drawled. "Go on, my son. Cut the cake, you're the youngest."

Jackdabos slit with his knife the muddy envelope. Heavy tarred canvas it was, well sewn with cobbler's twine, but so rotten that it flew apart like cheese-cloth, and sent crumbs of earth showering the mahogany. Then appeared a bluish wrapping of tea-

lead, which the Jackdaw quickly unfolded. The third cerement was oiled silk, yellow and blotched as if with sweat, but tough. The pen-knife blade ripped this from end to end, with a gritty noise that set the men's teeth on edge. Inside the gap thus made, Jackdabos fumbled for a while.

"There!" he cried, and tore away silk remnants from something which gleamed. He flung the wrappings on the floor. "What'll you bet?"

"Great guns!" murmured the Englishman, forgetting to smoke. "Troy town!"

All four jostled their heads together and stared.

Before them lay an oval platter of dull gold, as large as an ordinary serving-tray. The edge was a crusted garland of golden leaves, laurel and myrtle interwoven; the rest, a glorious theatre of human forms crowded into action, like the shield of Achilles. Jackdabos and his knife had cut the ancient world open. Troy stood midmost in the gold, its high walls breasting the surge of the Greek army, well-greaved and helmeted Achæans whose waves broke powerfully under the Scæan gate. Above the battlements, outshining Priam and his elders, enthroned, a lost and lovely queen, sat Helen looking for her brothers. She yearned for them and feared them. They would never reproach her. They were dead, and buried in the dear soil of Sparta, their native land. But like her dream and memory of their young splendor, to

right and left of the siege appeared her brothers as Helen had known them—the great Twin Brethren, Castor taming furious horses, Pollux boxing with a king. A flight of doves crossed the curving sky, Troyward bound from Cyprus; and rimming the bottom of this plate in a script as beautiful as any of the moulded limbs above, ran the lines:

*“Sic te diva potens Cypri
Sic fratres Helenae, lucida sidera. . . .”*

Barjavel stood up and blew like a dolphin. The Englishman ran his fingers, burning cigarette and all, through his gray hair. Puig lifted the plate greedily, weighed it in each hand, then put it down. Jackdabos, coolest of the company, was the first to speak.

“Helen’s legs,” he observed, “are the legs of the Fontainebleau Nymph. And what helmets! Oh, my golly!”

Until now the Englishman had shown no curiosity, nothing more than a polite tolerance, toward his captives; but on hearing these words, he sat erect, darted one glance at the sunburnt Jackdaw, met his glowing eyes, nodded, and thenceforward, though studying the golden wonder close and hard, spoke only to the Jackdaw, as friend to friend.

“Your view of Helen’s legs is very sound and scholarly,” he rejoined, smiling. “They’re draped,

of course, and the Nymph's are not. But all the same . . .” After more study of the plate, with muttered exclamations, he launched into a rapid technical discourse which ran for a quarter hour, and which two of his hearers admired greatly without understanding a word. “Yes,” he concluded, wringing his long fingers in satisfaction. “Not one of the books ever mentioned this, not Cellini himself—there's the puzzle! That chatterbox, never to drop a hint about any such design. Incredible!—But youngster, you hit it. Helen's figure is the same, done from the same model, I'll stake my head: from that little wild brunette girl Jeanne—what's her name, poor young thing?—the Scorzone.”

Again the lecturer sought Jackdabos with his eyes. He leaned back, smiling thoughtfully, as if he had found the young man more problematic than the plate.

“Do you mean to say,” boomed Barjavel, striding up and down the floor, “that it really is Cellini?”

The Englishman nodded.

“Unmistakably,” he answered. “Made in France, by Benvenuto, for Francis I. Look, by the way,” and he pointed to the golden door of Troy, “there's the king's own salamander.—Oh, it's quite all right. The greatest find of our day, my friends.”

Jackdabos bent down and became absorbed.

“Salamander's badly done,” he murmured. “The

only one thing wrong, though, for all the rest is perfect. But his curves ought to go like this."

Dipping his hand into the silver pitcher, the young critic sketched with wet finger-tip a design on the mahogany.

"I'd bend that salamander so."

The Englishman whistled under his breath.

"Right again," said he, in amazement. "Where did you learn these things?"

"Making graveyard statues," replied the Jackdaw impatiently, as though everyone made them, "and goldsmithing a bit, and doing pottery. Bah! You know. Odd jobs, that kind of rot."

He was lost again in the world of Troy, Helen's contemporary, sharing her present woe and her memories of the far-off brethren.

"The Twins always were my favorite gods," he meditated. "If a fellow prayed hard to 'em, could he manage one piece half so fine as this before he died?"

With the air of a righteous man who had endured enough nonsense, Puig grasped the gold platter and weighed it once more. His mustache bristled with calculation.

"What's it worth?" he demanded. "Set a fair price for us. We might get cheated."

The scholar shook his gray head.

"No price," he answered, looking distantly among the candle flames.

"What?" yelled Puig. "It's real, ain't it? You said so."

"More real than you or I," said the Englishman, coldly. "Its value is what the owner thinks."

The blacksmith jeered as he set the gleaming legend down.

"Well, just so. We're the owners, and we want to know what to think."

"Owners?" Jackdabos cried in hot disdain. "You fool, nobody can own a thing like that, any more than a mountain or a star."

The Englishman glanced over to where Barjavel bestrode the fireplace. Barjavel acknowledged his glance. Together, like secret judges, they watched this angry, mud-stained couple brawling over their fortune.

"Neighbor," propounded Barjavel, mildly, as if to change the subject, "how do you like the man-trap I set in my garden?"

His neighbor laughed with a quiet relish.

"Humph!" said he. "You caught one."

CHAPTER X

EXEUNT OMNES

ONCE more they had gathered in conclave round the Trojan plate, and sat speechless, intent, in various eager postures of admiration, when suddenly the Jackdaw wriggled from his chair and left the group. All eyes turned to watch him. Straight from the end of the table, quick and soft-footed, he reached a door at the innermost corner of the room. There he stood, listening, cocking his head against a panel.

“Eh?” said Barjavel.

Jackdabos, with a flash of his black Egyptian eyes, warned them to go on talking.

“A gorgeous evening,” declared the giant, promptly. “You’ve no idea what a lark it is to have old cronies drop in. About time, don’t you think, for a little supper? As for drinkables . . .”

He rambled through a bountiful inventory of his cellar, while Puig and the Englishman forced a few comments. All at once, Jackdabos twisted the knob and jerked the door open.

A black corridor, so far as the candle-light would reach, yawned empty. Jackdabos craned his neck, leaned into the darkness, listened again, then softly closed the door.

"Got away," he said, returning to lean against the table, his lips quirked in their odd smile, but his brows contracted. "The man's gone. Must have been his going that I heard."

Mild reflections from the sculptured gold played on his face while he stood thinking.

"Puig," he demanded suddenly, "where did you leave your trowel?"

"Chucked her down," replied the smith, staring. "Why not?"

"No reason why not. Stuck mine into that ivy," mused the Jackdaw. "Doesn't matter. The hole's there. And Alfredo's patrol was ordered to call your cook, Barjavel, from the back gate. If they found the hole, now?"

Barjavel wagged his beard thoughtfully.

"No harm done," said he. "Gardeners dig holes, even lazy gardeners like mine."

"We're in Italy," retorted the youngster. "Alfredo's a jolly round man, but no fool. Gardeners, moreover, don't dig holes in——"

A sound of footsteps coming along the corridor broke short his explanation. Jackdabos leaped back, made a downward swoop, amassed the muddy wrap-

pings from the floor, and stuffed them behind a row of red morocco bindings on a bookshelf. Next moment, somebody tapped at the door. Before the tapping ceased, Jackdabos lunged halfway across the table, reached with both arms, and recovered like a fencer. A broad gleam passed through the air, over the swaying candle flames. Helen of Troy vanished in a golden mist.

“Come!” cried Barjavel.

The door opened. Alfredo the Ventimiglian showed his plump red face, huge mustachios, and twinkling eyes. He entered with a gesture of apology, and tucking his pompous hat under one arm, closed the door, beside which he placed his roly-poly figure at attention, an easy, fat man’s attention, not even half-military. He excused himself, no one more polite.

“I came to thank you, sir,” he said, bowing toward Barjavel. “My men and I are about to leave. We enjoyed your supper, and wish you a felicitous night.”

“Good night, my friend,” the giant sleepily drawled. “You found all to your satisfaction?”

Alfredo smiled a merry smile which tilted his buffalo-horn mustache.

“*Ecco!* Abundantly, sir,” he reported, and turned to go. “By the way,” he added, with his hand on the door-jamb, “we discovered someone had been digging

recently near your ruin. I suppose it's all right, sir?"

Barjavel yawned.

"Quite, thanks. My gardener had word to spade up a new flower-bed. Lazy fellow, I dare say he didn't finish his work before night."

Alfredo's merry smile grew broader.

"I dare say not, sir," he agreed, lingering on the threshold. "The fact is, your gardener may have misunderstood you; for he made his excavation in the path, and not with a spade, but a trowel. I nearly broke my shins. Lucky I'm fat."

He laughed, and cast a look of great friendliness round the company. Barjavel sat unmoved, as though he had finished a trivial conversation; the Englishman started another cigarette, and calmly began reading a book by candle-light; but Puig, wary and sullen, glowered the defiance of a man who expects to be hauled into custody. As for Jackdabos, he stood in the best available shadow, listening quietly, with arms folded. No one could have guessed what golden loveliness he hugged, like a breastplate, under his velveteen jacket. No one could fail, however, to spy the mud clotted on his elbows, or the earthy smears which rendered Puig's face more haggard than its wont.

"Good night, gentlemen," purred Alfredo, brushing the magnificent hat.

"Good night," the culprits answered, in various tones.

"Glad to meet you again, old one," added the Jackdaw.

"It was a pleasant surprise to see *you*," Alfredo chuckled. "I hope I may have the honor repeated—soon!"

He scattered largess of cheerful nods, and took his departure, smiling.

"Soon, by all means!" called Jackdabos, running to the door. "We must talk over old times. I'm bound south, you know. May I look you up to-morrow at Ventimiglia?"

"*Ecco!*" answered the policeman's voice, amiably, from the dark corridor.

Jackdabos closed the door, and made a wry face. For a time no one spoke. Then Barjavel shrugged his shoulders, and inquired:

"All serene?"

Jackdabos, frowning, shook his head.

"Not a bit of it. Alfredo is O-N, on."

The Englishman laid his book down.

"Right," he observed, very dryly. "If Alfredo overheard my lecture on Benvenuto, you'll never carry that thing out of Italy; not, at any rate, past him. Alfredo speaks half a dozen languages, and he's far from deaf. Italian soil is a ticklish material to scratch. There's a Government after its kind,

and something like a Commission of Arts." He stretched out his long shanks, and gripped the arms of his chair, ready to rise. "Now you've got it," he asked, quizzically, "aren't you lost?"

Barjavel soon dismissed that question.

"I claim no part in it," he boomed. "I wash my hands of the whole affair."

The tall Englishman rose.

"Pontius Pilate was not altogether an ass," he laughed. "I do the same. Good night, gentlemen. No, thanks, no supper. The hour's late. Time elderly devils went to bed." He lounged across the room, parted a brocade curtain which covered the glass door, and became a shadow on the moonlit terrace. "Let me know how you dispose your booty," he called, from without. "This happens only once in a dozen generations."

Barjavel locked the glass door carefully, drew the heavy brocade into place, then came and took his friends one by each hand. They moved toward the fireplace, where for a time they remained, searching one another's face in the glow cast by the ruddy *boulets*. Jackdabos kept his free arm across his breast, holding the Trojan plate concealed. Puig scratched his head and pouted at the fire.

"Good boys, both," said Barjavel, with emotion. "Good boys." His large gray eyes glittered solemnly.

"I'm glad of your success. The thing is all your own. And now, what next?"

The blacksmith saw lions in the way.

"Too much moonlight. We can't get back into France by the way we came; and to-morrow this Italian jackass will have men watching the whole border line. He knows. God bless our luck, he knows! It's your fault, Barjavel, for you called him here. You couldn't trust us."

"And thou, Jacko?" asked the giant.

"Made in France." Jackdabos rapped his breast, which gave a sound like muffled armor. "Made in France for a French king. It never was meant to stay in Italy. Over the border we go."

"How?" the other two demanded.

"On our feet," he replied. "It is thus, brothers. Two courses, as you and I and Alfredo know, lie open to us: either we keep the treasure here in this house a while, or we run it out of the country at once. If we keep it here, we're lost: that's only a question of time, of police work, watching. If we run it out to-night, the shortest way, we'll run plump into Alfredo's arms, anywhere between this fireplace and Torrent Saint Louis. His men are doggo in the heather, or else picketting the olive grove. Now, you heard me tell Alfredo that we were bound south, and would call on him at Ventimiglia."

Puig and Barjavel nodded.

"Because why?" said Puig.

The Jackdaw smiled.

"Because Alfredo is very subtle, for a policeman. He knows from Holy Writ that all men are liars, and from experience that I'm a fairly good one. So what's Alfredo thinking, outdoors in the heather?" Jackdabos looked very young and ingenuous while he posed this question. "Why," he continued, "our dear Alfredo thinks we'll do the contrary, we'll go, not south, but back to France. I'm such a rotten liar, don't you see? The last thing he dreams of, is that I told an honest fact, and that we're bound for Ventimiglia direct as fast as boot-leather will carry."

"But man," objected the smith, "you're only falling in deeper then,—further into the damned Italy."

"Oh, bosh!" cried the Jackdaw. "Can't you follow? It's a jolly old circumbendibus. We spoke the truth to Alfredo. Great is the truth, and doth prevail; for at Ventimiglia we turn due north for the Alps, shoot up the valley of the Roia, leg it like the devil on stilts, cross the frontier this side o' Breil—swim the river if we must, but I know a better way—then *grrimp* the mountain rocks up over the Col de Brouis—and so, early to-morrow morning, drop easy as a bird into Sospel, safe and hearty in good old France."

The beauty of this plan, or the firelight, or both, made his dark face glow like a girl's. Puig and the

giant, watching him, caught something of his ardor.

"Not so bad," observed the one. "Your brains live too near your hat, but they're all there."

"Excellent!" proclaimed the other. "I foresee a night that has some fun in it. Wait half a jiffy."

So saying, Barjavel released his friends, and ran to the door of the passage-way.

"Tie up your bundle, meantime," he called, as he disappeared into the darkness. "Newspapers and twine are in that box-seat under the window. Get ready to jump, while I see René."

He was off to the kitchen. Jackdabos wasted no time, but whipped from his bosom the gold plate, and laid it on the table. Then, kneeling by the window-box in question, he flung back the lid, pulled out a rustling armful of printed sheets, and rose to work. A moment his quick fingers played, and there lay Cellini's grandeur as a flat, thick, commonplace package, wrapped in several dozen copies of *Figaro* and *Le Petit Marseillais*.

"Barjavel's a keen old dog," he mumbled, as he bit the loose twine off the knots. "Nobody looks twice at a newspaper parcel."

Puig took it under his arm, jealously. They recovered their caps, and stood waiting, while overhead a rumble of voices and footsteps travelled through the upper chambers of the house. Soon afterward, Barjavel came laughing into the room and joined them.

He wore the old black rumpled serge clothes in which they had first seen him by the roadside.

“Ready?” said he. “All’s well. René has lighted the whole top storey as if we were going to bed. Our Italian friends will watch those windows till lights out, of course. Hope they won’t catch cold in their ambush. Come on. Douse the glim.”

He swept his broad felt hat over the candles, and all was dark except the ruddiness from the coal fire. Then, with a chink of curtain-rings gliding on a rod, one end of the room became a pale chequered lattice. Barjavel’s big shadow moved against the moonlight, opening this window—a tall, wide eastern window which looked away from France, sheer down over house and garden wall.

“Fourteen foot drop,” he whispered. “Are you game?”

Jackdabos climbed on the sill.

“I’ll go first,” he murmured. “Puigo, toss your baby down when I give you the word.”

“Jump into that black spot,” advised Barjavel. “It’s *genévrier*.”

The Jackdaw spun out of the window, and landed crashing in the shadow of the house below.

“Gimme the child,” he called, next moment.

Puig tossed out his white parcel, and followed it.

“Lord!” he cried, coughing. “My spine’s drove amongst my teeth.”

He and the Jackdaw stumbled upright, unharmed, in a patch of soft, wide-growing savin.

“Good-bye, old man.” They hailed the window above them, guardedly. “Thanks for all. Where shall we meet again?”

The householder looked down on them,—a blurred face in a dark square.

“Get out!” said Barjavel. “Don’t talk so loud, and stand clear o’ the mat. Think I wasn’t coming?”

They leaped from their savin bed just in time, as the black shape came hurtling down.

“*Achcha!*” grunted Barjavel, flat amid evergreen needles. “Missed it for the world!”—He bounded off the bush, caught his footing, and pointed down a moonlit mountain flank into Italy. “Come along. I’m with you, old as I am. This is better than living in a house!”

They ran. Behind them, above Goiffon’s garden, a row of lights in an upper storey told the world that a quiet household was going tamely, domestically to bed.

CHAPTER XI

ROIA STREAM

WHILE they ran, the three friends chuckled and whispered and joyfully swore. The pleasure of being together again, outdoors, foot-loose under the moon, gave to their flight a relish further enhanced by the likelihood that danger was following them. Barjavel cut capers, pranced, and galloped like a Percheron stallion between two ponies. The bedroom windows, false lights that dwindled and grew higher and higher aloft, soon vanished behind the crest of the hill.

Presently the Jackdaw halted.

"I'll join you in the road," he said. "Go on, while I see if anyone's following."

He dropped as if dead, prone in the dust and pebbles.

"Keep your gait up!" he ordered. "They'll show here against the sky."

Barjavel, and Puig embracing the white bundle, left him to lie there on a bare hillside, and went scrambling down the nearest dry gully among trees.

Loose rocks rattled after them, overtook, gambolled by them, and at last poured a noisy cascade on which they rolled down through bushes into a bright road, the highway to Ventimiglia. Here they stood and caught breath. The night seemed a miracle of pale blue space, every mountain a vaporous billow, every tree-top a clump of dark mystery, all the steep countryside dreaming, flecked with snowy villas, above that veiled expanse where a twinkle of moonshine betrayed the Mediterranean. Not a breath of wind moved the stillness anywhere. Then suddenly came plunging footsteps down the gully, another burst of pebbles, and into the road shot a little figure which was Jackdabos.

He sprang nimbly to his feet, sneezed, and reported.

"All right so far. Never a soul stirring. They're on the French side of your house, Barjy, waiting while we go to bed. We've got a clear field until morning."

"*Avanti!*" commanded Barjavel. "We have longer than that. If any policemen come inquiring to-morrow, René will tell them we all went to bed roaring ripe, as jolly as bricklayers, and can't have breakfast before noon. René is a faithful steward."

"O Serpent!" cried Jackdabos, delighted. "O Father of Lies! We're safe now till afternoon."

None the less they began marching at full speed

along the road, with now and then a spurt of running. Thus they devoured the way into Italy, talking seldom and saving their wind, until the railway lamps of modern Ventimiglia shone before them, and a church-bell in old Ventimiglia rang midnight overhead from a hill of darkened houses. Then they turned their backs on moon and sea, to follow the north road that wriggles up a narrowing valley into the Alps. Beside them rushed the Roia, shining and gurgling among its boulders. Straight ahead the mountains floated, ghostly gray peaks thinner than smoke, but bound together with deep, crinkled shadow-gorges that gave a hint of solid form.

“How loud the river sounds!” exclaimed Barjavel, after some two hours of hurried climbing. “It’s noisier than I ever heard it before.”

They were now past Firola, and traversing the blackest of the high gorges, where wooded crags cut off the moonlight. Sometimes a curving grayness underfoot told them where the roadway dodged under the roots of the mountains; sometimes a blind tunnel set them groping, and echoed each slow footfall sepulchral; but for the most part, running water guided them,—the hiss and rush of Roia torrent beside them charging down the twisted glens.

“But that,” cried Jackdabos, pausing and giving ear, “that’s not all water. I heard voices.”

Later, he stopped again.

"Many voices. A great many. At this time of night?"

And presently he added, in dismay:

"What the devil? Just when we wanted to be alone. Horses and men by the dozen. Is it an army coming?"

The next turn of the road answered his question, for it bent sharply round a crag, and opened a scene which brought them up all standing. From lonely darkness they were plunged without transition into flaring light and busy multitude. Lanterns, torches, and scattered bonfires glowed from end to end of a deep gorge, reddened a long forest front of pine branches overhanging the hillside on the right, and splashed with running reflections, below on the left, the gray-green surface of the Roia. Men swarmed everywhere, dumpy silhouettes, talking, laughing, calling one another with gestures, hopping over great mounds of earth in the road, scrambling out from the pine bristles, as if the hills had opened and poured forth a horde of goblins. They all hurried toward the same point—a group which, midway among the lanterns and fires, was rapidly growing to be a crowd.

"This won't do," growled Puig, hugging his newspaper parcel. "We must cut out round this mess."

Barjavel, staring at the lights, appeared doubtful.

"Better go roundabout," he agreed; then suddenly: "Oh, no, I remember!" he cried. "They're building

a railway up here. It's all right. Move ahead. Only workmen. This kind of crew is better than a wilderness, to hide in."

"Yes. But——" said the Jackdaw, eagerly, "there's going to be a row. Hear 'em? A regular Sabbath of cats!"

And he dashed forward gaily to join the tumult and see the fun. His friends, cursing this fickle ardor of his, followed as best they could follow, through heaped and cross-piled confusion—hillocks of sand, logs, chains, tilted dump-carts, derrick-ropes, quadrilateral beds of broken stone, plank bridges, and temporary roads, all mud, where from among the pine boughs gigantic horses, tethered and blanketed, raised here and there a sleepy nose and whinnied or stamped the ground.

Jackdabos was soon one of the workmen, elbowing his way—more subtly than his fellows—to the core of the crowd. He had spoken truly. A Sabbath of cats was well begun. Loud, cheerful, excited, scores of Italian voices drowned the lesser turbulence of the Roia, and made the green crags ring with echoes.

The crowd pushed and swayed, but kept its centre on the road, just before two wine-shops—cabins crazily built of raw brown boards—that stared down with doors and windows alight, from the forest bank. Each cabin bore a wilting bush above a sign-board scrawled with chalk. The "Trattoria dei Ferrovieri"

still contained men drinking round a lantern. Its neighbor, the "Hostelry of the Poor Devil," was a tiny hut which seemed deserted, though a pair of candles flickered within. So much the Jackdaw spied as he wriggled among the thickest of the press.

Next moment, however, he had no eyes for any such triviality. Among jostling bodies that reeked with garlic, he saw a long white pair of hairy ears flipping back and forth. They were the ears of a little white ass. The creature tossed her head upward and backward rebelliously, and made a scarlet bridle flash in the lantern-light.

"I'm dreaming," said Jackdaw, as he squeezed between two men and reached the donkey's nose.

There stood the girl—the girl of Aigues-Mortes rampart. Flushed and tearful, her bare head shining above the swart goblins who hemmed her in, she clung with one hand to the bridle, while with the other, holding the same rattan on which Jackdabos had performed his magic, she tried to wave back the worst of the crowd. She was talking, pleading, imploring breathlessly in French. A decent-looking foreman, who seemed more or less to understand her, did his utmost to clear the ring about them, but vainly.

On the donkey's back drooped a figure of anguish—the girl's brother, no longer jaunty, but pale as a

dead man. His eyes were shut. He sat biting his lips and groaning.

Just then the girl saw Jackdabos.

"Oh!" Her face lighted, her blue eyes flashed as though encountering an old friend. "You, monsieur! Thank goodness, you will help!"

"What's the matter?" asked the Jackdaw, in English.

"There was no lantern," she cried. "My brother has broken his leg. There was no lantern to warn us, and a pile of logs or ties, with a deep hole beyond them. Is there a doctor in this camp? Oh, these people! Get back! Please, please keep them off him. The donkey won't stand it, and every movement . . ."

The Jackdaw instantly wheeled about, and began patting the nearest heads and shoulders.

"Come, boys," he said, with lively good-humor. "Fall back a step or two. Of your grace, make room. A gentleman has broken his leg. Pass the word back. Show a little mercy, and give the gentleman room to suffer in. What the devil, it is not the Day of Judgment!"

With that, he put a jest of highly personal, descriptive flavor, on an odd-faced man who seemed the most forward and boisterous in the front rank. It was a merry word, low in its origin, but apt. The victim's friends laughed. Jackdabos, with fluent cajolery, at

once pursued this advantage, and aided by the foreman, shoved and tugged and persuaded until the laborers cheerfully enough gave way and formed a circle, crying shame on those who still pushed from behind.

Thus in a moment the Jackdaw, who would willingly have escaped notice, found himself a chief personage, the interpreter and central hero of the piece. Lanterns on the ground served as footlights, beyond which the audience jammed and struggled,—a cloud of dark faces, of gleaming teeth and eyeballs, of stable odors mingled with garlic.

“I saw lights,” continued the girl, beginning to sob with relief. “I thought there must be a doctor here. Oh, there must be!”

Jackdabos interpreted.

“No,” replied the foreman, shaking his crop-head. “I’m sorry for the lady. We have no doctor.”

The drooping rider on the ass groaned, and swayed as though to fall.

“Never mind, Ruth,” he mumbled, between clenched teeth.

His sister gave him a quick upward glance full of anxiety and pity; then her eyes met the bold, black, friendly eyes of the Jackdaw. Neither girl nor ragamuffin spoke a word, but intelligence crossed intelligence perfectly.

“You will help me?”

“To the world’s end.”

He was about to act on this dumb promise, when from the lighted door of the “Ferrovieri” drinking-den, and down the bank, came staggering a group of bleary, tousle-headed rascals. They broke through into the charmed circle, and stared owlishly. One drunkard was nursing half a loaf of bread, on which he mechanically smeared a gobbet of cheese with a table-knife.

“What’s here?” cried these roisterers, thickly; and they whooped, and began to talk nonsense.

Among them was a young scoundrel with a cunning, depraved face who seemed less drunk than his companions. He brushed the hair out of his eyes, bent forward, hands on knees, and leered up at the girl.

“Ah, bellissima!” he crooned, amorously. “Art thou come at last,—and with all that glorious hair?”

He sidled closer, thrust his ugly nose within an inch of hers, and said something which luckily she did not understand.

Jackdabos understood it. So did the workmen, many of whom laughed. But Jackdabos laughed not at all. He caught the creature and threw him against the wall of witnesses.

“Never dare say that!” he ordered, in a whisper that cut through the crowd and made all still. He himself saw dimly for a moment, as if the ring of

lanterns had turned red. Dimly his enemy's face gathered out of the darkness, and grew clear. It was a pale, wasted, grinning face, with loathsome dank hair flung over its forehead. The fellow was not drunk at all, but cold with fury.

"Never say it?" he rose to a crouching posture, and drew from his bootleg a long blade.

Then, deliberately, he said it again, and worse.

The Jackdaw, swifter than though all had been pre-arranged, caught the table-knife from him who ate bread and cheese. He took it lightly in passing. What followed was a rush and a shock, as of a tiger charging a bewildered calf. Somebody fell, a crumpled bag of clothes, rolling among the workmen's boots. Jackdabos pitched away his knife. It was not clean.

"You heard him," he declared, haughtily.

The Roia made its voice prevail in the long hush.

Jackdabos turned. He saw the white ass blinking; her rider peering dully as through a mist of pain at the fallen body; and beside these, the girl wringing her hands. At sight of her, he woke to the meaning, the continuity, the fatality of things.

"What have I done?" he cried sharply, and ran toward her like a child or a suppliant. "You counted on me for help. O fool! Miserable fool!"

She stared at him with a horror which he could not fathom.

"There'll be trouble. I made it for you, yes, but I'll get you out of it. Come."

He reached forth his right hand to beckon her away, clear of this danger which already growled on every side. "Come!" he besought her. "Trust me. Trust a poor fool." She recoiled from his hand. Blood covered the knuckles, where that pale beast had scratched him, after all. It was his own blood, and shed on her account. She could not be so unjust . . .

"Oh, well," he said after waiting, and turned to face the storm.

It burst with shouts and confusion and the brandishing of many Italian fists. A man dashed headlong and grappled for his throat. Jackdabos tore the man loose, then held him at arm's length.

"Be quiet," commanded Jackdabos. "I don't want to hurt *you*."

But his captive, one of the drunken party, began writhing and screeching for help.

"What! Are strangers to come here and kill us? At them! Save me, boys!"

A dozen men sprang forward. The Jackdaw freed his fists and made play while he might. The ring closed, the blows were going blindly.

"It can't last long," thought the Jackdaw, dodging, smiting, and being smitten. This was the worst fight he had ever known, for there was no pleasure in it: the presence of the girl, directly behind him,

clogged his soul with torment, a nightmare of reproach. "It can't last long."

Someone whom he had knocked over crept in and tackled him round the knees. He went down gamely, fighting, but none the less down.

A roar of triumph passed over his body.

CHAPTER XII

GUESTS OF THE POOR DEVIL

THE roar of triumph sounded strangely, not because it rang in the ears of defeat, but because it came from the wrong direction. With a rush and a trampling, it swept over Jackdabos from behind, met his adversaries full front, and scattered them like hornets in a gale.

Panting, aching, stunned with blows, he sat up.

The roar proceeded from Barjavel, who was charging the enemy alone, sweeping his mighty arms like a swimmer. Every sweep overturned three or four workmen.

“Back, to the wine-shop!” cried the giant over his shoulder. “Into the wine-shop, Jacko, the other one, the little one. Into the Poor Devil!”

Shouting, he stooped, caught a burly rioter by the ankles, whirled him aloft like an Indian club, then swung him horizontally through the air. A windrow of the mob fell before this human cudgel.

Jackdabos cast a glance behind.

At the wine-shop door above stood Puig, hesitating, clinging still to his white bundle. The hesitation was brief. Next moment the smith dropped his treasure on the threshold, leaped up, caught the signboard of the Poor Devil, hoisted himself like an acrobat, wrenched off the faded wine-bush, and fell with it to the ground.

“Hoy!” yelled Puig in a Berserker voice.

He ran to the nearest bonfire, into which he poked the bush. Resinous evergreen, dried to the color of iron-rust, it caught at the first touch and flamed.

“Hoy!” hooted the smith. Hurtling down the bank into the fray, he laid about him with his burning bush. “Get the lady out, Jacko! Indoors! The way’s clear. Indoors!”

The fallen Jackdaw gaped, rubbed his head, and sprang up. Once afoot, he gathered his wits.

The white ass, frightened by Puig’s fire, was backing violently, though the girl dragged at the halter. Jackdabos went to the ass and laid a gentle hand on her nose-bone.

“We are going into the Poor Devil now,” he said. “Come, little friend of our Saviour.”

All animals were kind to him. The ass forgot to struggle, moved willingly where he led. Upright on her sat Brother Ralph, but like a man in a swoon. The girl, releasing the halter, followed. As they climbed the bank, Jackdabos looked down on the fight,

and saw the road swept clean of people, the ring of lanterns deserted, the mob retreating, dividing, falling before his friends. Puig's bonfire bough whirled among scared faces, threshed them and showered them with sparks, while the roaring giant caught up men by handfuls, cracked their heads together, and tossed them away like rubbish, laughing and talking while he fought.

"This," resounded the voice of Barjavel, "is better than living in a house!"

The Hostelry of the Poor Devil contained two flickering candles, as before, but apparently nothing else. Through its open door Jackdabos led the ass, who stepped daintily over the sill, over Puig's newspaper parcel, into the middle of the floor. Their entrance drove a man backward, in surprise, from some peephole near the door where evidently he had been watching the combat. He was a wiry, sun-dried little old man, keen of glance, bent, furtive, rapid in movement, with scrubby gray hair bristling like a squirrel's tail.

"I don't keep a stable," he snapped, while his gold ear-rings trembled fretfully. "I keep a wine-shop."

The Jackdraw disregarded him.

"Lean over. Let yourself slide. Gently, sir," said Jackdabos to the sufferer. "Now into my arms. There. So."

He lifted Brother Ralph down from the ass, laid

him on the floor, and placed under his head Puig's bundle for a pillow. The girl, kneeling, tried to give aid and comfort.

"They'll burn the house down over our heads," complained the landlord.

A voice from the doorway answered.

"No, they won't." It was Barjavel, glowing with exercise. He remained outdoors, his attention divided between room and road. "If they do,—here. I'll buy the shop."

Barjavel reached in a bottomless gulf of a pocket and dredged up a fistful of gold pieces.

"That enough, Pierre?" He tossed them chinking on a barrel-head where the candles burned. "The Hostelry of the Poor Devil is my house now, Barjavel's Entire."

The landlord stared, made a queer sort of ducking salaam, then pounced on the coins.

"Any more asses outside?" he chuckled. "If so, bring 'em in, as many as you like."

Jackdabos had his first good look at the speaker.

"What, Pierre, is it you?" he cried joyfully. "Peter the Ferret, always near the border! Incorrigible smuggler, show us your latest run-way. We must be off, old *Furet du Bois Joli*."

The landlord of the Poor Devil stared again, then burst out laughing. His dryness, his furtive air,

seemed to drop from him like a mask, leaving the man all warmth and genuine affection.

“Jacko!” he exclaimed. “Why, Jacko, my dear son, always in trouble!”

The girl, kneeling by her brother, gazed from one to another of these noisy outlaws who had forgotten her.

“You missed your man, Jack,” said Barjavel, grinning. “The dirty brute’s alive and well, though you knocked his wind out and scared him green. He’s none the worse. Couldn’t be that.”

“Thank God!” cried the girl.

Barjavel smiled at her, benignly.

“You may trust yourself,” he declared, “to my young friend, Monsieur Jackdabos. All’s well. I must shut the door now. Good-bye.”

As he spoke, Puig dodged under his arm and entered—a grimy figure powdered with ashes. The door closed after him. The shutters were already barred across the one pair of windows. Imprisoned, the little company in the wine-shop heard murmuring without, and a loud scuffle of many feet approaching. A stone hit the boarded front and made the place boom like a drum. Barjavel’s voice was heard, quietly and calmly expostulating. There followed a lull.

“Show us your back door, Ferret,” said Jackdabos. “Don’t tell us you haven’t any. We know you better.”

The little landlord winked solemnly.

"I wouldn't do this for everybody," he replied. "But for you, son, and your party, here is one gate into France."

The back wall of the wine-shop appeared a solid rank of shelves which contained bottles, wicker flasks, liqueur jugs, a few loaves of bread, and smoked meats hanging in mysterious brown clusters. Peter, the Ferret of the Pretty Wood, went straight to the middle compartment, removed a jug, and fingered something which clinked in the darkness. Toward him, on silent hinges, there swung a four-foot width of shelves, to reveal an irregular opening bordered with rock. This Hostelry of the Poor Devil stood with its back against a crag; but in that crag yawned a black fissure, tall and narrow.

"Behold my catacombs," announced the landlord. "Climb straight up, Jack boy, then through the trees, then to your left. You'll know the rest of the way when you see it. The old granite path."

His guests hung back, eyeing one another in perplexity. Here at their feet was the chief encumbrance, this young man who lay so pale, and still, and handsome, as though asleep or dead.

"I'll carry him," growled Puig. "He'll have to chew his misery a while longer. Not the first man that ever suffered. You take my plate, Jacko, and lead the ass."

"You," said the girl, looking at Puig askance, "you never can carry my brother. He's so large."

The sturdy blacksmith scowled up in her face.

"Can't?" he retorted. "Poor little runt, am I? You wait."

Reaching for a wicker flask on a shelf, Puig skilfully flicked out the oil from its neck, and took a long swig of wine. Then he smacked his lips, and bending down, raised the girl's brother lightly in his arms.

"I can lug this," he boasted, "from now till Christmas."

Jackdabos meanwhile gathered up the Trojan plate—which seemed a worthless burden at that moment—and took the ass by her mane. Peter the Ferret lighted them with a candle to the mouth of the fissure, where, smiling and bowing, he wished the young lady good night, a pleasant journey, and a safe recovery to the poor gentleman. The girl faltered somewhat, as well she might do, when she saw before them a crooked slit of a cavern floored with broken rocks.

"You're not afraid?" urged the Jackdaw, impatiently. "Our friend Monsieur Barjavel, who is a gentleman, promised I should do my best for you. I sha'n't lose my head again to-night."

They stepped through rows of bottles into the cleft: Puig and his armful, the girl next, Jackdabos and the white donkey last. No sooner were they well inside the crag, than Pierre closed his smuggler's door, and

left them blinded. They heard—the sound came floating over the Poor Devil's roof,—a loud, musical voice lifted in oratory. Barjavel, abandoned, was not only guarding the front door but winning his audience. He had the mob laughing.

"No one is much hurt?" he inquired, persuasively. "Those who wanted a fight have had one, the rest of us were entertained. It's either Saturday night or Sunday morning. We don't have to work to-morrow. As owner of the Poor Devil, I invite you all to come have a drink. Until the house goes dry as a bone . . ."

They lost his conclusion in a rumble of sound; rock walls enfolded them with dungeon thickness and darkness; the donkey's hoofs clattered on pebbles, now and then flashing a long, soft spark, until at last, after many winding ascents among jagged granite and tangled roots, light began dawning overhead. They mounted as through a succession of ruined chimneys. A steep and dusty climb brought them from rocks to matted pine-boughs; another, from boughs to pale moonlight on a mountain ridge. They had forgotten the moon. Here in the cold upper air, she covered a bosom of the hills with mystical pallor.

Puig laid the injured man on the grass, and busied himself there.

"Broken," said he. "Broken right enough, but simple. Better not delay."

"We must go get splints," agreed the Jackdaw.

"No, I'll find 'em," said Puig. "You stay with the lady."

He disappeared among the pine-needles whence they had climbed.

"Poor old Ralph, are you suffering?" asked the girl.

Her brother lay and stared at the setting moon.

"I'm all right," he answered, in a tone that belied his words. "Quite comfortable, thanks. It's my own fool fault. Sorry we didn't stop where you wanted, Ruth."

She sat holding his hand for a while.

"I ought not have let you go on," she said. "The night seemed so beautiful. We were both moon-struck."

He did not reply, but shivered. Jackdabos, who had remained aloof, standing by the snowy flank of the ass, now came forward, took off his jacket, and spread it over the man's body. He then returned to his place. The girl presently rose and joined him there.

"You must be cold, sir."

"Not at all," he answered, though drenched in sweat, and ready to freeze. "Thank you, mademoiselle."

She stood regarding him doubtfully. He made no advances.

"Can't you bring us to a doctor?"

He offered a gesture of excuse.

"Have patience. We shall go on immediately, when we have set your brother's leg."

"Can you do that?"

"That?" He shrugged his shoulders. "We can try. Broken bones, mademoiselle, are nothing novel to us."

She was on the point of giving him up, for he appeared distant, grave, wrapt from her understanding by ages of hard, patient experience. A detail, slight but odd, increased this effect. The late scuffle with the workmen had knocked his old cloth headgear into a curious overhanging fold, so like the Phrygian cap that in the moonlight he seemed the incarnation of some youthful god. What god, she could not remember.

Piqued, and also very anxious to maintain at least a form of friendliness with her guide, she made another attempt.

"Aren't you glad the man is alive?"

"What man?" he inquired.

"The man you stabbed."

"I didn't stab anyone." Jackdabos leaned on the donkey's shoulder, and warmed his hands in his pockets. "I was awkward. I failed. That's why he's alive."

"And you don't care!" she exclaimed, growing indignant. "You tried to kill, and you're not sorry."

The leaning stoic surprised her with an outburst of passion.

"I tried to let him have it right through his raspberry!" he cried, exulting. "Make the worst of that, mademoiselle, if you like. It doesn't matter. The wish to kill was there, though you hate me for it, and wouldn't touch my hand. Sorry? Yes, I'm sorry because—well, what you call a gentleman would have kept his head, thought of you first, and got you out of this botch better than what I'm doing."

He broke off abruptly, and stared at the grass, frosted with moonlight.

"My blood's not that kind," he added.

She waited for his next word. It did not come. Jackdabos patted the donkey's neck, then remained motionless,—a queer little statue of pride and penitence, crowned with his Phrygian cap.

"The man you tried to kill," she resumed, "what did he say?"

"Nothing."

"I insist on your telling me."

"Girl," replied the Jackdaw sternly, "you are very young. You don't understand men. Be content with that."

The trees below them rustled. Puig came toiling out of the shadows, up the barren curve of the ridge. On his shoulder he carried a bundle of scantlings that rattled, and in his hand a coil of light rope.

"I stole the best I could find," he reported.

The Jackdaw sprang forward.

"We'll set your brother's leg," said he, with alacrity. "Now, my poor friend, have courage."

By moonlight, he and Puig squatted to perform the necessary work. It was not easy. But the girl, watching them and vainly trying to help, found herself lost in wonder at their quickness, their powerful, unerring movements, their knowledge of what to do. Her brother made never a sound until the process ended, and he lay with one scantling from armpit to ankle, another from ankle to crotch, both bound cunningly with rope that nowhere pinched or loosened.

"Thanks, you chaps," he moaned. "You did that—aah!—like a charm."

"Did well yourself. Good pluck," said Puig. "I like him better than I thought."

Jackdabos helped the girl to rise. This time their hands met.

"Now for France and a good doctor," he said. "I know the short way over the hills."

Through the troubles of that moment, she felt a curious fear and joy, as if she had become owner of some beautiful wild thing. The moon descended among pines beyond a slant Alpine spur, and through the mountain air passed the change, the stir, the universal sigh of morning.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SARACENS' PATH

RUTH MOULTRIE was not like Chaucer's heroine, up with the sun. Rarely had she seen the dawn of day except as a spectacle, a "view," a custom for which travellers made arrangement over-night. She would have agreed with that writer—had she known him—who declared early risers are conceited all morning, and drowsy all afternoon. Dawns were good, she loved to read of them in poetry; but as a healthy, wealthy, and wise girl she always had slept late.

Now the real dawn crept round her unawares. The moon had set, withdrawn its last glow-worm light behind the peaks; a few stars, lonely white sparks without lustre, were one by one being quenched; and there succeeded, not twilight, but a nameless and sorrowful blue element, a profound blue obscurity, as though all the color of the sky had fallen to bottom, concentrated, and darkened the air.

It frightened her, this unearthly medium through which they walked forlorn.

"When shall we reach the path?"

She put the question to Jackdabos, whose white shirt guided their steps.

"We're in the path," he answered.

Nothing but bare ledges appeared underfoot, nothing but monstrous gray cliffs and overhanging shadows defined the limits of her wandering.

"Here?" she exclaimed. "Are you sure?"

The white shirt bobbed along composedly.

"I know these hills like my thumb," said Jackdabos. "It is an old path. Some call it the way of the Saracens. There are different names, although few of those who name it could tell you where it runs. Just now it is the private Corniche of Peter the Ferret. Before we met you, to-night, I had thought of climbing into this path, but farther along."

She took his word for the unseen track, and followed. Behind her the ass ambled faithfully, another white blur among shadows, carrying her brother, who rode silent as a ghost, and obeying the bridle-hand of a dark thing known as Puig. She waited for them, and would have talked, but her brother answered in a dazed way, while Puig, respectful but saturnine, was too busily watching step by step the animal's progress. After a time Ruth went forward again. Their leader moved quietly and steadily on, as though unwilling to be overtaken, or even to be thought willing. Ruth hated all manner of surliness; but while

she continued to walk alone, thinking, it occurred to her that perhaps this little runagate, ahead, this manstabbing conjurer and hill vagabond, was only being polite. It would be curious to know . . .

She quickened her pace, and came alongside him.

"My brother still has your coat," she began. "Don't you need it?"

"No, thank you," replied Jackdabos. "I am walking, he must keep still."

He was not surly, but quiet and self-contained. His readiness to answer and then to let conversation drop, struck her as a form of courtesy. She would persevere.

"This morning light is very beautiful," she ventured. "I never knew the world could look so old and full of—strangeness."

He smiled at her, sidelong. His face lighted wistfully in the gloom.

"That is the nature of the world," said Jackdabos. "It declares itself best before the day." He walked along in silence, then tossing a glance back toward the donkey, added: "Just now you were like the Flight into Egypt. I would paint it so, with this dark blue and strangeness, as you said; and these violet-gray mountains butting their heads together like rams; and up aloft, the little slow pink fire beginning to make the snows burn at the tip. Like now. Only you would be riding the ass and holding the Child."

Ruth looked at him quickly, and away. His words took her by surprise, like the sudden opening of a window that revealed both the inward man and the outward prospect of his world. Aloft, very high above this colored solemnity, an Alpine crest had caught the sunrise. A little slow pink fire kindled, as he had told her, the highest pointed billow of the snow.

"I had not seen it," she confessed. "Are you a painter?"

The queer little fellow shook his head, mournfully.

"No, mademoiselle. I am nothing,—nothing but a bad character. The tricks of painting, yes, I know 'em all, the tricks. But not to pass in, deeper, through the face of the canvas. You understand. For me, the door of the foreground is locked. Beyond it are those fields and landscapes. No. I have not the key of the fields."

Ruth watched him while he spoke. No less than his words, his manner puzzled her, for it seemed full of regret, discouragement, and humility. Often she had recalled that sunny afternoon when they met on Aigues-Mortes rampart. In her memory this young man had remained as a distant enigma, a gay outcast of Provence, clever, mystifying, with a dash of the braggart and the charlatan. Now, at her side, he became another man.

"When you turned this," Ruth raised her rattan,

“into the rod of Moses—or was it Pharaoh’s? You remember?”

His eyes glowed with sombre delight.

“I shall never forget.”

The reply startled her. It was no compliment, but a truth wrenched out of the man. She caught up her broken sentence hastily.

“You said, at the time, that you could do anything.”

The Jackdaw groaned and hung his head as he walked.

“Once a fool, always a fool, mademoiselle.”

They continued marching together, but for a long time without speaking. Ruth found that her heart began to beat an alarm. “What have we said?” she asked herself. “Nothing. Nonsense. But I thought he disliked me, and he doesn’t.” That momentary sombre glow of the eyes, that promise given against his will, torn from him, declared a certainty which was not at all dislike. She should have been more frightened; she should have been more angry; but fear and anger touched her only with passing wing; for she knew that beside this dark-visaged, fiery-eyed young brawler she walked as safe as ever she had walked with Ralph, her brother. She rejoiced at the knowledge, and marvelled at her own rejoicing.

When Jackdabos again spoke, he confirmed this wonderful security. He threw off his restraint like a

bad disguise, and warming, brightening as he went, became a chatterbox.

"A man lived in Castellar," said he, "a friend of Peter the Ferret's, who had a wife so sweet-tempered, mademoiselle, you could hardly tell when she hated you. I knew them both. They owned a very intelligent goat who slept under the bread-cage. . . ."

It was a merry tale, half-truth, half-fable. He made her laugh, beguiled the journey with laughter. So this Path of the Saracens wound through the mountains like the way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent upon a rock, and the way of a man with a maid.

Certainly Ruth never could have retraced it. Once they went plunging down a narrow glen smothered in tall pines; once they crossed an ancient, broken bridge under the arches of which a gray-green river raced and smoked with morning mist; and once her friend the Jackdaw, halting their little column in a defile among jagged boulders greater than houses, commanded silence, because they were climbing a forbidden mountain where soldiers might catch them for spies. Then, after a long, bewildering ascent, they labored up from the last lingering shadow of earth to a desolate Alpine mound, and stood alone with the sunrise, their own shadows pointing far ahead over white grass that sparkled.

“France,” said the Jackdaw. “We’re well into France, and quite safe.”

They gathered round the ass and her rider, drew breath in the golden mountain air, and surveyed this promised land below. Even poor Ralph looked down with hollow eyes, and muttered something of admiration. The wild, scarred barriers of gray rock, rolling in gigantic confusion round the sky, were parted asunder. Far down among them, green, smooth, like acres of lawn, lay Bevera valley. A dark, meandering river marred this lawn; and bridging the river with brown-tiled roofs, gray walls, and the stump of its church tower, old Sospel sent up from chimneys here and there a few straight filaments, the early sacrificial smoke of the workmen’s breakfast.

Puig called Miss Moultrie’s attention to a long white barracks encumbering the valley floor, apart from Sospel town.

“There,” said he, “is the fools’ golf house. I will go find a doctor there. Take this, Jacko.”

And he held out his bundle of printed papers.

The Jackdaw smiled at him.

“No, keep it, Philibert. I’m going myself. The road’s just below here. Wait in the road till I come back with a motor car.”

So saying, Jackdabos tightened his belt, and set off running down the bare hillsides like a Marathon man.

"Maker of Days!" he prayed while he ran. "Hope I've got enough money. Wish old Barjavel had shot his gold pieces our way."

Ruth Moultrie watched him flying downward from undulation to undulation of the *col*. At last he was only a white speck, dancing and wavering against the rim of green Bevera valley. She stared after that speck, intently, but with the feeling of one lost in a dream. It was time for her to be exhausted: she had climbed up, down, and roundabout all night, while Ralph, her leader and chief adviser, sat helpless waiting to be led: but she was not exhausted, or even pale. Her cheeks burned. The Way of the Saracens had put a charm upon her.

Less than one hour later—for Jackdabos ran well—she heard a whining among the hills, and round a turn of the Col de Brouis road, where she waited with Puig and her brother, leaped a powerful black motor-car, skimming the incline as a bird skims upward. It stopped before the ass could take fright. Out hopped the Jackdaw, a weary little god from such a great machine.

"The doctor will be at the hotel," said he, doffing his cap. "I made them telephone to Nice. Now if monsieur your brother will let us place him on board?"

Monsieur her brother was lifted carefully from the

roadside and laid on leathern cushions. The driver at the wheel, a stoical young Frenchman, scratched his mustache and wondered what his passengers had been doing, but did not inquire.

Ruth leaned from the car to say good-bye. She had no leisure then to guess, and never afterward knew, what meagre pockets had hired that vehicle, or what humiliation the Jackdaw, in hiring, had suffered from lackeys of the rich. But she was grateful, and sorry to part company.

"How can I ever thank you?" she cried, as she handed down the Jackdaw's old velveteen coat. "Ever?"

"*Pas de quoi*," muttered Puig.

The ass dropped her long white ears forward, and sniffed the taint of petrol in the morning air.

"What shall we do," said Ruth, "with our poor donkey? I can't leave her like this."

The Jackdaw stood thinking rapidly, his hands deep in the empty pockets.

"I'll sell the donkey for you," he replied, "if you like. Sell her at a good price, to a woman who will treat her kindly."

Ruth beamed on him. Here, she thought, was a man who could indeed do anything, a worker of opportune wonders.

"Oh, can you?" she begged. "It will be a great relief to me."

Jackdabos patted the ass's head.

"She will have a good home," he promised, "and you a good bargain." Removing the saddle and its wallets, he gave them to the charioteer. "Shall I send the money to your hotel?"

Ruth looked down at him and hesitated. She could trust him, of course. She had only to consent, and say good-bye. They were leaving the Saracens' path behind once for all.

"No," she answered, on impulse. "Bring the money."

He bowed. Again that sombre glow lighted his black eyes.

"To-morrow, mademoiselle?"

"To-morrow."

The stoical young driver, flirting with the laws of gravity, whisked his car about on a mountain edge. Ruth turned and smiled. The two wanderers, holding the donkey, made an obeisance which lasted until the turn of the road intervened, and they stood alone.

"Humph! A hard night's work," sighed Puig, with relief, as he wiped from his cheeks the soot of the burnt wine-bush. "We're well out of that!"

Jackdabos remained listening, cap in hand. His face wore a distant, preoccupied expression.

"Oh, yes," jeered Puig. "You'll see her again." And he crowed in mimicking falsetto: "To-morrow? To-morrow! I'm to be Queen of the May, mother!"

The Jackdaw turned on him, over the ass's mane, a grin of humorous dismay.

"Don't be foolish, Philibert le Beau."

The freckled smith watched him like a cat.

"I'm not the fool. Jacko, I warn you. Be careful."

For answer, Jackdabos took hold of the scarlet bridle, and began to lead the ass down-hill. Down and down the road went doubling in long loops round spur after spur. Morning filled the green meadow valley with brightness.

"A magnificent day," sighed Jackdabos, quietly regarding the grim Alpine rocks patched with snow. "How good to have France under our feet again! I never feel at home in Italy."

"Changing the subject," quoth Puig.

The other put on injured innocence.

"Why," said he, "I'm only going to sell the girl's donkey. At a profit, mind you. She came to the right shop for dealings in horseflesh and assflesh."

He led on, whistling, and spying round the hillside after good herbs, with which to make something he had just thought of.

"Bah!" said Puig. "I warn you."

CHAPTER XIV

SELLING THE ASS

SARA the donkey-woman, on the Promenade du Midi, found her business rather slack that afternoon. It was hot, the glare intense, the Gulf of Peace very blue and tranquil, with tiny waves which hardly whispered. Sara, planting herself comfortably on the stone wall above the waves, began to knit. There would be no family parties riding in this heat. Her squadron of asses knew as much, and gratefully slumbered at their hitching-post. Sara rounded the heel of a stocking, and watched the wealthy Northerners go by so aimless, fat, and bored, while she, a lean, dark woman, thought of so many things.

“What a pretty creature!” exclaimed another woman’s voice among the passing parasols.

Sara glanced from her knitting.

Out from the greenery of the Carëi gardens came pacing a dainty milk-white ass, so trim, so glossy, so meek and yet spirited, that she might worthily have borne the Faery Queen.

"Not bad," thought Sara. "Mine are growing dingy, poor cattle."

The milk-white ass wore a scarlet bridle. A swarthy little fellow in velveteen was leading her. They came toward Sara on the sea-wall.

"Mother," said Jackdabos, "what do you think of this?"

He grinned at Sara, and Sara's brown face lighted with sudden affection.

"That boy again!" she cried for welcome, and dropped her knitting in her lap; then, critically: "Pipe-clay. You've pipe-clayed her like a circus horse. Is that your profession now, Jacko? Going to sell me a pup?"

The Jackdaw scorned such talk.

"Not for sale, mother. She belongs to the Great. Her name is Mignonette. She is by Narcissus, her first dam Snow-Drop, second dam La Vallière."

Sara picked up her knitting and resumed the turn of the heel.

"You lie," she stated, calmly. "I can tell all that family by their noses. Better try to sell me the crocodile of Nîmes. You are a liar, a young liar; and you've been giving the poor child herbs to drink."

"I've not!" shouted Jackdabos. It was exactly what he had been doing. For some hours he had scrubbed and curried the ass, fed her, pipe-clayed her, and refreshed her with a drink of white wine

mixed with mountain herbs. "I have *not*. She's entirely as you see her, wind and limb."

He hopped up on the sea-wall and tucked his arm round Sara's waist.

"I always tell you the truth, mother," he declared. "How awfully well you look!"

Sara laughed. She knew the Jackdaw of old.

"How much are you asking, Jacko?"

They bargained long and shrewdly, with great respect for each other's wit, and with all the joy of merchants from Cathay. Jackdabos argued, swinging his legs; Sara knitted, and frowned, and repulsed him with her elbow; while round them passed the unenjoying crowd, back and forth, along the Promenade by the blue sunlit gulf.

At last they agreed on a price. The Jackdaw jumped down.

"You can't have this!" He took off the red leather bridle. "But the rest is yours."

Favoring her old bones, the donkey-woman Sara got down off the wall and examined her purchase again.

"Who owned her?" she inquired.

"A lady."

Sara wagged a brown finger.

"O Jackdaw. Fie!"

"There's no commission for me," rejoined the Jackdaw stiffly.

They parted, each with honors of war. Jackdabos carried off a goodly round sum of money, also the scarlet bridle hanging from his hand. A few tourists, gazing toward the bright blue water, saw him bend and embrace the donkey's head. He seemed to them an unaccountable young native. Sara herself could not account for him.

"Why," she demanded, "do you hug the beast?"

"Why not?" said Jackdabos. "It is a good beast. 'Alexamenos worships his god,' maybe. I also am an ass."

The dark Sara meditated, standing amid her long-eared troop.

"The owner was a lady?" she rejoined. "Look out, my son. You seem above yourself. I warn you."

That evening after dusk, when stars began to peep over Mont Agel, there came a loud knocking at the door of a man who made majolica. The man opened his door, and saw by his lamp-light a very determined, sunburnt face greeting him.

"You offered me a job once," said Jackdabos.

"More than once," retorted the man. "More than twice, young Skip-the-Hedges."

"Advance me a month's pay. I'll come work it out later."

"When?"

"When I can," replied Jackdabos.

"That's cool," grumbled the man.

“Pretty things, kickshaws,” urged his visitor. “A full month’s work, all new designs hot out o’ my head: what you and your blessed tourists call charming, dainty, original, exquisite, refined, attractive, characteristic, damned breakable poppy-cock and glaze-bosh. To tickle the rich women. I can make it. Pay me now.”

“That’s cool,” said the potter again. “Come in. Perhaps . . . If I had the money . . . Lots of you boys I wouldn’t trust, Jacko. Come in.”

Later in the same evening, a wheelwright who lived beside Gorbio Torrent had let his loft room to a familiar lodger. Till midnight, candles and a bright hearth fire burned in the wheelwright’s loft, while his lodger worked like a noisy brownie, whistling and singing. Jackdabos had on the floor his old canvas bag, from the mouth of which he carefully drew the only good clothes he possessed in the world. Two borrowed flatirons, by the fire, stood heating.

“Beast, you are nothing but wrinkles,” said the Jackdaw, holding up a dark-gray flannel coat. “Come, submit to the goose. To-morrow you shall do your master credit among the English in their earthly paradise.”

There were no wrinkles on Jackdabos when to-morrow came, and at four o’clock of a fine afternoon he walked into the fools’ golf house at Sospel. His gray flannel, smooth and modest as a doe’s hide, brought

him such credit that he passed as one of the worldlings crowded there. Among their babbling herd he moved like a quiet little woodland spy, watching, until across the lobby through tall window-frames he saw the shining head that he required.

Ruth was outdoors on the terrace, under one of the many red parasol tents that sheltered the tea-tables. Alone, unconscious of her chattering neighbors, she regarded thoughtfully the green meadow below, where sheep strayed cropping near and far, golf-players followed their lazy pastime over the turf, and small peasant girls, bare-legged, carrying bags of silly clubs, swung along with the free stride of mountaineers. Her vision included them, but passed beyond, out from the green, sunlit valley to another place, a distant thought, a memory. She sat wondering; and wonder softened her dark blue eyes. These holiday people, these men in tweeds and women in jaunty costumes, appeared a feeble folk, their talk a vacant drawling, their meadow and terrace a gay and costly picture of dulness. They were good enough people. Why should they be tiresome? Ruth looked at their faces, then away once more. Bevera valley was not a valley of contentment. There was a world elsewhere . . .

Her mood was interrupted. A quietly moving figure paused beside her table.

Ruth glanced upward. It was the sunlight under the red parasol, perhaps, that colored her cheeks

“Ah!” She roused. “You—you startled me.”

It was only Jackdabos, but he arrived as promptly and silently as if her thought had called him, a spirit from that world elsewhere. He bowed, hat under arm, with a formal but inborn grace. Not one tea-drinker on the terrace could have bowed so, or worn so like a garment the breath of life, the air of nature.

“You sold my poor pet?” said Ruth. “I am sorry to lose her.”

“Yes,” replied Jackdabos. “But she will live in clover. She will carry nothing heavier than some pretty little English child. I think she brought a fair price.”

He named the sum, and learned with disappointment that it signified nothing. Ruth’s face, indeed, grew troubled. She thought this child of nature might suddenly pour handfuls of money on the tea-table. Then she felt ashamed of her fears.

“I left it at the office,” continued the Jackdaw. “Mademoiselle is quite satisfied? I have the honor to wish her good evening, and a happy recovery to monsieur her brother.”

Again he bowed, and turned to go. Ruth made a little gesture that detained him.

“You have been ever so kind,” she said. “How can we show our gratitude? I was thinking only now—I wish——”

She broke off, timid and confused. The young man

smiled, with a brave sadness that comprehended all.

“Good-bye,” said he.

Before she answered, there befell an unexpected thing. Toward them along the terrace came a woman dressed in white,—a slender woman neither young nor old, but of ageless beauty, though a silver frost touched her black hair curving from the temples. A murmur followed her passage, for all the worldlings knew her and sat staring admiration. The Princess—the lady into whose house Jackdabos had once lied his way—advanced directly to Ruth, who rose.

“My dear girl,” said the Princess, kissing her, “I’m so glad your brother’s accident was no worse. Can he be moved? You must come to me now instead of later. The villa is quite empty.”

Both ladies sat down, in a pretty flutter of talk which left the Jackdaw standing forgotten. He was about to steal away, when the Princess remembered her manners and cast him a glance.

“What? My little friend?” she asked, in a surprise which turned to welcome. “My little friend of the cigala? Oh, do sit down. I have another scolding for you.”

Thus it happened that Jackdabos, who had ironed his clothes at the wheelwright’s for the sake of a moment, of a look and a word, found himself drinking tea with two incomparable ladies. Their tilted scar-

let parasol became the centre of the terrace, the cynosure of envious eyes. Their glory daunted him at first; but he took heart, and from answering their questions politely, soon was carried into the history of last night, the tale of the Saracens' Path, and even some guarded hints of the Trojan Plate. He told it all funnily and well, Ruth and the Princess urging him with laughter. When he ended, the sun had crept off the greensward, the evening chill had overtaken them, and time to go indoors.

"Remember," said the Princess, when they exchanged good-night, "you're coming to the villa, to-morrow week, to spend the afternoon. Remember. We do not trust you, little wretch."

Sunset lighted his homeward way along the winding road, till he passed by ruined Castillon and gained the crest; then sunset burned above the violet immensity of the Guardia rocks, as though all the world behind them were blazing fire. Jackdabos had climbed quickly; now he went lagging down Carëi gorges, so thoughtful and with such retarded step that the greenish lamps of Mentone garlanded the shore below, and the large moon rose over the sea, long before he came to his wheelwright's house. All the way he carried an inward joy, a secret exaltation which seemed greater than the mountains, brighter than the evening air.

"It is not over." He hugged that fact in his bosom. "It is not over yet."

On the next day, and six days following, his friend the potter had a new man who worked early and late with a concentrated fury of execution. Jackdabos was over-paying his debt.

"Stay a full year with me," begged the potter, in tears, "and we shall make our fortune."

The Jackdaw shook his head.

"I'm serving one week of my sentence," he laughed. "The rest will have to wait. After to-morrow . . . I don't know what may happen after to-morrow."

With that, the laughter died from his face, and he walked sombrely out of the potter's trellised garden, leaving unfinished, on his bench, a medallion of the Flight into Egypt.

"If I have to chain him!" raged his master, staring at it. "Why, this would take old Luca himself!"

Without thought of any such triumph, the Jackdaw went rambling down the road, then through one street after another, aimlessly. It was early dusk, not yet the lamplighter's hour, and many foreigners loitered still on their way home from their afternoon idleness. The Jackdaw passed with them, dejected, along an avenue where spotted sycamore pillars upheld a canopy of young leaves and wiry branches and balls against the failing sky. A man came push-

ing a small water-cart, like a black dust-bin on wheels, which unrolled along the pavement a dark ribbon of moisture, printed with letters where the stone remained dry. "*Nice. Café Lascaris. Nice. . .*" ran the gray legend underfoot, in wearisome repetition. On the top of the water-box lay a flat paper parcel. The cart-wheel, in passing, grazed the Jackdaw's leg.

"Pardon me, sir," grunted the modern Aquarius. Then he looked up, and caught Jackdabos by the sleeve, roughly. "What!" said he. "Hold on!"

The hand-cart man was Puig—but Puig worn to an anxious, freckled shadow of himself.

"Jacko!" he exclaimed, miserably. "I've been looking all over Tophet for you!"

The Jackdaw stared.

"Why did you run away, then, and desert me?"

Puig let the accusation go unanswered. It was true. He had basely carried off the Helen of Troy treasure, and vanished, while his friend was busy with greater affairs.

"See what I've come to!" He kicked the push-cart, which stood drowning its own print. "To this. I'm nigh starving!" He took up from his water-box the paper parcel, and shook it like a dog worrying a bone. His green eyes shone hollow and desperate. "Your filthy species of a plate, it's killing me. I can't sell it. Who'd buy that, from a scarecrow like me? I can't sleep at night for fear o' thieves, can't

leave it anywhere, daytime. What kind of a job could I get, this devil's thing always under my arm? Worse than being chained to a corpse. It's your fault, too. Bah! Have to carry the great lump of a howling fraud on a Push-Cart! A Leak-Box!"

He bellowed the words, and spat with frenzy. Passers-by looked curiously at him. It was plain that he had spoken one truth, at least, for his cheeks were gaunt and fevered with wakefulness.

"This is nowhere to talk," replied the Jackdaw, quietly. "Come see me to-night, at the wheelwright's."

Puig thrust out his heavy parcel.

"Take it off *my* hands, anyway," said he. "You've got good clothes: maybe you can peddle it. I'm done!"

He slammed the treasure into Jackdaw's arms.

"I'm done!" he roared, in a passion.

"What do you expect me——"

"Don't care," bawled Puig, fiercer than ever. "Do what you like." He seemed beside himself. "If you cheat me, I'll kill you." Then, with a reckless fling of the arm, as though giving empires away—"What do I care about your trumpery?"

The Jackdaw stood pitying him, though smiling. Thirst of gold was on the man, the cup at his lips, and he could not drink.

"Come see me to-night."

"Good," sighed Puig. "That's a relief." He grasped the handles of his water printing-press, and grew visibly calmer. "I'll drop round."

They were parting, when to a halt at the curb, a few paces off, there softly trundled a long gray motor car, its varnish glimmering in the twilight. The driver, a tall man, climbed out and came forward to bend over his lamps.

Puig, watching him mechanically, gave a start and let go the handles again.

"I see the Devil!" he murmured; then, with a kind of joyful snarl—"I see the Devil!"

He turned on Jackdabos a happy face, the face of a man to whom the gods have blown a windfall.

"That's the fellow!" he sang, and cracked his hands together. "The fellow that killed my dog!"

In two bounds Puig crossed the pavement and had the tall man by the ears. Women screamed. A crowd came running to gather, and push, and question, and follow a fight that rolled along the gutter. Uniforms of the police colored the general grayness of the tumult.

"I don't care!" whooped a voice, presently, from under a wall of legs. "Go on! I spoilt his looks, I spoilt his collars and things!" It choked, but burst out anew. "He killed my dog, and I . . . Take me, go on, take me! I don't care!"

The voice was borne away on the stream of the

crowd. Lost to view, but chanting in praise of destiny, Puig vanished toward whatever dungeon might be ordained.

His water-cart stood flooding the pavement; and beside it Jackdabos grew aware that he was left alone in the world with something heavy.

Under his arm he carried Puig's legacy, the Trojan plate.

CHAPTER XV

CALLERS

A BLAMELESS old man, a white-haired major-domo whose only sin it was to wear forked whiskers and a Pecksniff collar, sat in a quiet corner of the Villa Pervinca and read his own pet *Journal*. He read peacefully. There were guests in the house, and guests were rare nowadays; but these, although they had thrown him into a heat by coming suddenly, gave little or no trouble. A young gentleman with his leg broken; a charming young lady whose dark-blue eyes did not overlook the merits of a major-domo: it was easy to live under the same roof with them, to maintain the settled calm of the household.

A bell rang.

“Tish!” The old man lost the point of a lively paragraph. “That front door again! Ah, yes, there was to be a caller.”

He folded his paper, smoothed his black coat, and went with pontifical meekness to open the door.

A very alert young gentleman in gray stood waiting on the doorstep.

"Ah, monsieur le vicomte," murmured the old man, vaguely. "The ladies are in the garden, sir."

His memory had failed of late, and caused him perplexity; but perhaps the young gentleman would take no offence, even though the title were inadequate and wrong. Fluttering with pleasant agitation, he led the caller through the sunny hallway, to the glass door and the inner garden path.

"I'll find them," said the viscount, smiling, and went down the slope among winding flower borders and tall pine-tree shade. He carried a green baize bag under one arm.

"I ought to have known his face," thought the major-domo. "It is a highly distinguished face."

Thus, altered by fine apparel and an English hat bought with the potter's money, Jackdabos, that Apache who once had burst his way into the villa, wandered freely through a bright, enchanted garden. Green lawns curved under pines and laurels, down toward a limestone parapet which overlooked the sparkling blue of the Ligurian Sea. From somewhere on that sunny verge came a quiet sound of voices. The Jackdaw descended, following the sound, and carrying his green baize bag.

Behind the bayonet clusters and fiery-pointed blossoms of an aloe screen, on a high-backed stone bench

covered with blue-and-white cushions, sat Ruth and her hostess, bare-headed, in the sun.

“Good afternoon,” said the Jackdaw.

Both ladies wore white; both were laughing when he arrived; both greeted him kindly and made room on the curved settle. The Princess had at her throat, like a sign of welcome, the little silver brooch, the cigala that he had made long ago.

“I have brought you a curious thing to see,” declared the Jackdaw, when for a time they had talked of passing matters. “A most curious thing.”

Loosening the puckered mouth of his new baize bag, he drew out an oval shield of gold, which dazzled the eyes.

“Ah!” sighed Ruth, as though frightened. Her hand touched his by chance, receiving the Trojan plate.

“How lovely!” said the Princess, turning her dark eyes on his face. “You made it? Yes, it is more of your work.”

The Jackdaw’s cheeks grew red. His heart melted at this heavenly compliment.

“If it were!” he cried. “O ladies . . . if it only were, I could give it to you.”

They bent their heads together over the gleaming field of the legend; and there in the garden sunlight, while the ocean and the dark pine branches breathed unheard mysteries round them, they saw the walls of

Troy, and dreamed the sorrowful dream of Helen above the gate, yearning for her brothers among the helmeted host.

“Not yours?” said the Princess, doubtfully.

Jackdabos would have died for her.

“It’s Benvenuto’s,” he replied. “I will tell you.”

They listened to the story like people transported beyond the bounds of the present world.

“It’s not mine,” he concluded. “Not mine in any sense. Who could own such a thing? Tell me.” He appealed to them as to old friends, infallible judges. “We dug it up in Goiffon’s garden. Should we send it to Goiffon’s widow, the lady at Arles who told my fortune?”

“No,” answered the Princess, thoughtfully. “That would be useless, for I know Madame Goiffon would never accept it. She was too happy in her little garden, and cannot bear reminders.”

Jackdabos groaned.

“Then what the dickens to do with it,” he declared, “I do not know.”

They all gazed down again into the golden myth, and again lived through that moment on the Scæan Gate. The splendor of it, actual no more than spiritual, shone upward on Ruth’s face and in her eyes. Jackdabos, close beside her, knew that she was conscious of his thought.

Footsteps came grating the sanded path. The

major-domo stood before them, bowing his white head.

"Madam's brother," said he, "is at the house."

The Princess rose quickly from their bench under the aloes.

"I will come back, children," she said, in haste.

When she was gone behind the green bayonet leaves, Ruth and the Jackdaw sat down together, alone, awkward, and constrained. Ruth put the Trojan plate between them, glistening on the blue-and-white cushions. For a time they watched the sea below their limestone parapet,—a band of azure light broken, far off, by the dark Dog's Head and the low, wavy shadow of Cap Ferrat.

"How," said the girl, by and by, "was your fortune to come?"

"My fortune?" Jackdabos wondered at her.

"That the woman in Arles told you."

He remembered then his mention of it, recalled once more a dark lady who lay in a wheeled chair beside a bowl of wavering goldfish, and foretold her fancies.

"Why," he answered, leaning on his knees, "it was nothing. . . . She said I must follow beauty with eyes open. Beauty would come to me from something old. Yes, from old stones,"

Ruth looked toward him, then down at the sea.

"Did it?" she asked, and touched the golden plate. Jackdabos gave a start, and sat upright.

“You too,” said he, “are a sorceress. We dug it up near a Roman ruin.” He remained silent. The pines, or the ocean, filled a long interval with sighing. He spoke at last, hoarsely. “But the ramparts of Aigues-Mortes are old likewise, and built of stone.—I saw you there.”

Ruth managed to withdraw her eyes from that blue gulf beyond the garden rim. She found the Jackdaw’s face grown pale under its sunburn, his lips quivering.

The Trojan plate lay between them, and flashed like a dividing sword.

“I saw you there,” he repeated.

Fear, panic fear of what the next moment might bring to pass, a sense of being hemmed about by mightier spells than any this young conjurer could weave, took hold of her in silence and trembling. Yet these terrors came by no fault of his, nor was the light in his black eyes any false, earthly fire. She waited. Whatever he said now would be inevitable, not his own words merely but the utterance of that meaning which hovered closer and closer round them, as vast and as clear as the sunshine.

It was broken, dispersed for the moment.

A sound of music floated down through the garden, over the scarlet aloe points. In the villa someone with vigorous hand struck a few rollicking chords that rang from the open windows. Then a voice, a lusty

barytone, broke into song. It was the old song of the Ettrick Shepherd:

“ ‘*My love, she’s but a lassie yet,
A lightsome, lovely lassie yet,
It scarce would do
To sit and woo
Down by the stream sae glassy yet.*’ ”

Jackdabos recoiled in amazement, then sprang upward, one knee on the bench.

“That?” he stammered. “That voice is Barjavel. What is Barjavel doing here?”

Ruth listened. They watched each other, these two children whom the Princess had left alone, while the song drifted over them toward the sea.

“ ‘*But there’s a braw time comin’ yet,
When we may gang a-roamin’ yet;
And hint wi’ glee . . .*’ ”

Jackdabos rose from the bench, and stood on foot.

“True,” he said, harshly. “Whoever it is, that’s not by chance. And it’s true.”

Her head was crowned with a brightness greater than Benvenuto’s metal. Jackdabos looked down on it as though for a lifetime.

“A man should have a name, at least,” he said. “Mine’s nothing but a poor joke.”

Ruth was up in a flash of indignation.

"It's you!" she cried, facing him, at once angry and overjoyed. "A name? It's what you do! There's nobody like you . . ."

He bowed gravely.

"Let me be the woman," she hurried on, "to tell your fortune." She pointed down at the shining picture of Troy. "It is pretty—yes, too pretty, finikin, womanish. Your work must be a man's in every line. You said I couldn't understand men, but I can tell. That?" She cast another motion of contempt on the golden wonder. "You shall make me something finer than that, a hundred times!"

The Jackdaw stared like a man waking.

"Finer? For you——?" he whispered. "By the Lord, I'll try!"

As if blinded by this idea, he bent down and groped for his hat among the cushions; then he stood handling the brim, twisting the plaited straw back and forth mechanically.

"I'll try," he repeated.

"The woman at Arles," continued Ruth,—"what did she say?"

He told her, briefly.

"Are your eyes open?" said the girl.

"Yes." He laughed, proudly. "They are."

"Then follow it with your eyes open," she commanded. "That is what we expect of you."

Jackdabos turned abruptly, walked away down one of the flowering alleys, halted in some hidden part of the garden, and presently came marching back like a soldier.

“Make my good-bye to the Princess, please,” he begged lightly. “I cannot bear——” He waited until he could smile. “Don’t expect too much. It will be a long day.”

“Perhaps,” Ruth assented. “A long day.”

Avoiding glances, they stood side by side and looked beyond the tops of rosemary and laurel fringing the cliffs, to where the blue gulf moved and shimmered toward them from the tranquil west.

“Light of Earth,” said the Jackdaw at last.

No one could have told whom the words were spoken to:

He turned.

Ruth lifted the Trojan plate, and thrust it into the green baize bag.

“Here, then.”

“Keep it,” replied Jackdabos.

“No,” she said, scornfully. “Am I not to have something better?”

At that they laughed and their eyes met. Neither spoke again. Then the Jackdaw, swinging his bag over his shoulder, wheeled about face and rushed off up the garden hillside. He dared not look behind, but ran across lawns and skipped the flower-beds,

making directly for the kitchen end of the villa and the servants' gate, where he might slip out unobserved.

From the open windows above the slant pine branches came, as before, the tinkle of a piano, merrily played, and a barytone voice that rolled out the Ettrick Shepherd's song:

*“ ‘But there's a braw time comin' yet,
When we may gang a-roamin' yet . . .’ ”*

Ruth heard it, on her sunny ocean crag under the aloes.

“I wonder,” she thought, clasping her hands—weak hands that had no skill in them. “I wonder. Oh, the poor boy! My poor brave wonder of a boy, going alone!”

Jackdabos also heard the promise of the song, while he carefully shut the gate and paused, hesitating, under evergreen shadows in the avenue. He did not see much of that environment. His eyes indeed were open, but to another world.

“Maybe,” he said. “Maybe.”

Something wet had touched his hard brown cheek.

“Damn, it's not raining!” he grumbled. “And now we know Her, by the great horns of Moses, but we can sing like any of them.”

Down the road he went, lifting his voice as best he

could contrive. It was poor singing, and a hackneyed old air:

“ ‘*Faites, reine immortelle,
Lui dit-il en partant,
Que j’aime la plus belle
Et sois le plus vaillant.*’ ”

Ruth did not hear that challenge to the world. She sat pondering over the feebleness of womankind.

CHAPTER XVI

A MATTER OF ANTIQUITY

THE world, being old and deaf to challenges, went on its way. Cold weather fell during the night; so that when Jackdabos looked from the wheelwright's upper window next morning, he saw, beyond young sycamore leaves, all the mountains white with snow, like enormous tents pitched aloft in a sharp, blue, wintry heaven. He needed courage to go down and bathe among the rocks of Gorbio stream. After bathing, he was glad to stand by the forge-fire, and pump a groaning bellows, while his landlord hammered out a pair of trace-chain hooks.

"Many a blow," grunted the wheelwright, who was a sturdy, bent old man with a face like that of some humorous gray bear, "many blows to make a man's fortune."

Sparks—long, white-hot, fuzzy stars—spattered from anvil to doorway; the double chiming of iron rang in the darkness.

"I was thinking that very same thing," said the Jackdaw, mournfully, at his pump-handle.

"You? You're too young," rejoined the leather-clad veteran, laughing and smiting. "But remember, son, the blows are better than the fortune. Always."

Fortified with this doctrine and warmed by the work, Jackdabos set forth early to begin his own campaign. It was a brilliant morning, the sunshine that of spring, but the air keen as autumn; for the mistral, blowing high overhead, made its passage known by a tingling in the nostrils and a dry clearness of vision. Above glittering palms, bright gardens, and mild orangeries, the mountains impended solemnly with pinnacles of snow and torn bare precipices cinder-black against a chill sky, desolately blue. Jackdabos walked briskly on a high road behind the town, making for the rocky defiles of Pont Saint Louis and the Italian border.

"Only Barjavel remains," he thought. "I must tell Barjavel my woes."

But when he had crossed the frontier and arrived at that wall among mountain heather over which peeped the rose-colored front and the lemon-tree tops of Goiffon's house, he knew his journey was in vain. Shuttered windows, a smokeless chimney, and profound silence declared the place empty. Jackdabos pulled a bell-handle in the wall beside the gate. After long waiting, he pulled again, and yet again. At last

came a sound of footsteps inside the garden, a wicket suddenly opened in the gate, and through the round hole peered a little, shrewd, red face like the face of a very old English Punch.

This, thought Jackdabos, must be René the faithful.

“Monsieur Barjavel?”

The eyes of Punch twinkled.

“No,” said René. “You have come to the wrong house, my friend.”

He was about to slide the wicket shut. Jackdabos hooked one finger over the edge of the hole.

“Your master, then?”

“Not at home.”

“Oh!” cried the Jackdaw in despair, and drew bow at a venture. “I’m a friend of his. Tell me. Is he not visiting his sister?”

The little, sharp, watery eyes blinked—once, and no more, but enough to show that the question had hit fairly.

“I cannot say, sir.”

Jackdabos withdrew his finger, let the wicket close, for a moment stared at the blank timber of the gate, then turned and went back, despondently, by the path he had come.

“No use,” he told himself, wandering with chin on bosom. “I’m alone. Barjavel’s gone. I *did* know his voice in the garden yesterday. Gone? There never was any Barjavel. He’s the Princess’s brother; one

of the great, merely joking with us for a pastime.”

He shrugged his shoulders, miserably, as he walked.

“Barjavel gone. Puig in jail. And we were like three brothers going to accomplish fine things. Bah! I make you a present of the lot!”

He marched on heavily, across the high bridge into France, down the rocky hills to the sea, and then among the wearisome “trippers” promenading the Midi shore. Suddenly he left this crowded embankment, and plunged into the streets of Mentone; for he did not care to pass the donkey-stand, or meet Sara, or see a little white ass. Indifferent to all the rest, he wandered across town, through the Dragonnière, up over a wooded shoulder of Cap Martin, and so roundabout with lonely thoughts.

The wheelwright’s maxim, after all, seemed to point the one way out of his distress. Many blows, nothing but hard blows well struck, would bring a man through to fortune; though here was this Cellini platter, of course, which if cunningly sold would fetch at once more than a lifetime of poor man’s earning. Even the gold, melted down . . .

Jackdabos halted, overborne by disgust.

“Temptation?” he said to himself. “Temptation? Bah, if I sold it, then, would that be fortune? No, my Jacko, the trouble is inside us. Riches do not improve the inside.”

Riches would not serve. He frowned, and scratched the top of his ear.

"I left that green bag," he remembered, "on the table upstairs. Beelzebub and Hobbididence know who may have stolen it by now! One cannot go properly to work with that damned treasure always lying undigested on the mind. I shall come, like Puig, to a Leak-Box!"

He raised his head and looked about, to see where the consideration of this quandary had led him.

"Must be somewhere near Cabbé Roquebrune."

As a matter of fact, he had strayed into a little depression among the hills, an oval amphitheatre of lawn surrounded by olive groves. The clear sunshine of a mistral day poured through the trees, flooded the level green turf, and brightened a host of gay banners, the tricolor, which waved from mast to mast in a woodland circuit. Jackdabos knew the place, even before spying the many white-washed bars and hurdles encumbering the lawn. It was the place of the Concours Hippique. A few stable-boys were leading blanketed horses back and forth under the edge of the trees; and out in the central sunlight a young army officer rode a glossy bay mare who winced over the green like a vain dancer.

"Straighten the jump there, will you?" called the officer.

Jackdabos found that he stood near a hurdle which

leaned askew. He ran obediently to lift one end and set it right. With a drumming sound the dainty hoofs charged toward him; and up over the barrier in a greyhound leap flew mare and rider.

“Magnificent!” cried the Jackdaw, forgetting his private griefs in the love of horseflesh. “I give you the prize, monsieur!”

The bay mare returned frivolling at a walk. Her rider, an alert soldier whose fine, serious countenance was tinged with a clear pallor, nodded his thanks in passing.

“Ah, the pretty filly,” chanted Jackdabos, with vicarious pride. “You have there, sir, a very flip-pant jumper.”

The officer smiled at the young man’s eager up-turned face. It was a face that knew horses.

“Not bad?” he said. “Here, hold this for me, please.”

He unfastened his black cape, and whirled it down into the Jackdaw’s arms. Then with a hint of the bridle-hand, he sent the bay mare galloping down the course, skylarking over the bars. When he returned, he pulled up for a moment to let Jackdabos and the mare nozzle each other, which they did with great interest and satisfaction. The boy spoke a few words to her in some crooning dialect. She whinnied, and laid her short little racer’s head on the brown velvet-
een shoulder.

"You have bewitched the lady," laughed her rider.
"She is no sycophant."

He caught the youngster watching him secretly with an odd, shy glance.

"But I've seen you before," said he.

"Yes, my captain," replied Jackdabos. "In the army."

"Eh?" cried the horseman. "When? Where was it?"

He named an obscure and far-off battlefield.

"Yes, sir," agreed the Jackdaw, and named two others, grinning proudly.

The captain smiled, but with a trace of sadness in his dark eyes, as though this young wanderer's face recalled memories—many things lost and forgotten.

"I know you now," said he. "A very annoying young devil who never stayed in the background."

The Jackdaw modestly touched his cap, for this as it happened was praise.

"Eh, well? How goes it, my boy?"

The boy replied that his affairs went in excellent order. But as he made this reply, there came an inspiration.

"May I talk with you, sir," he begged, "for ten minutes?"

"Fire away," said his captain.

"Pardon, sir. Later. First I must go and come.

There's a very important thing I should like to show you. Highly important."

"Concerning what?"

"Concerning France."

The captain consulted his watch.

"I shall be exercising horses here," he declared, "till lunchtime. If you run both ways, you'll find me here."

The Jackdaw thanked him warmly, returned the black cape neatly folded, and set off across country like a paper-chaser, vaulting one of the hurdles for pure light-heartedness. All the way to the wheelwright's and upstairs he ran; then all the way back uphill, with a heavy green bag thumping his ribs. In the pleasant glade of the Concours Hippique, he found his captain still riding the bay mare, though now at an amble, her practice done for the day.

They met in the centre of the oval.

"Are your lungs made of leather?" asked the horseman, smiling.

"It is nothing," replied Jackdabos, flushed, but breathing easily. "I was afraid of missing you, sir."

As a peddler opens his pack, he untied the bag-strings, fumbled within, and quickly extracted the broad golden plate, dazzling in the sun.

"There," said he, handing it up.

The captain balanced the glorious object on his

saddle-bow, and stared like one amazed by legerdemain.

“What’s all this?”

Leaning against the mare’s shoulder, Jackdabos told him. He sat listening, immobile, an equestrian statue; only his fine dark eyes moved, but they penetrated the young man through and through.

“It sounds very droll, but I’m not lying, sir.”

“I know you’re not, my child. Continue to avoid that mistake.”

Jackdabos continued, with spirit and humor.

“It is genuine,” he concluded. “A great English scholar told me so. It is no counterfeit. Benvenuto Cellini made it; indeed, who else could dream and execute such a piece? Perfect, barring the salamander on Troy gate, which is bad. But perfect!”

The captain, his first moment of surprise past, nodded gravely, like a man who had seen many matters far less credible.

“Odd,” he murmured. “A very odd story.”

“Sir, you can’t imagine,” said Jackdabos fervently, “how I have lain awake nights, puzzling. To think of such a prodigy ever being lost—or ever found again. Enigma! The things we lose, the things we keep—enigma of the past! It crushes me, sir.”

His captain did not laugh or mock, but eyed him curiously, and then said:

“I know. Charlemagne was a great emperor.

Somewhere in Paris, the Bibliothèque, I fancy, there's one poor little old time-eaten ivory chessman which belonged to Charlemagne."

He waited, but not long; for this bright-eyed youngster caught the point almost at once.

"You think like me, sir!" exclaimed the Jackdaw, as if marvelously honored. "Yes. If Charlemagne came back, and saw his one chessman standing there, he would cry: 'What the Devil! They kept that little old thing, when I owned such a lot of stuff, me, Charlemagne?'"

The two men smiled, agreeing well. Jackdabos patted the mare's neck, and became lost in a day-dream, his gaze fixed on the tricolor banners fluttering brightly round the olive-girdled circus.

"You had some question to ask?"

"Oh, pardon me, sir." The dreamer woke. "I forgot. Your time is not like mine, worthless. May I see our plate once more?"

The captain reached it down. Jackdabos took it in both hands, held it out at arm's length, and with a gleam of primrose light quivering over his tanned cheeks, fell to such a study of the golden work as though he were storing away the sight of Helen, her brothers, and beleaguered Troy in his mind forever.

"It was made for a French king." He thought

aloud. "The kings are gone, but there is always France."

He returned the plate to his captain.

"You know the great and the powerful, sir. Please make them keep this where we others, we short-legged fellows, can see it now and then on a Sunday."

He stepped backward, smartly, two paces from the mare's shoulder, touched his cap, turned, and walked off with a little contented swagger across the green turf. He had reached the boundary of the oval before the astonished captain came riding alongside.

"Here, you young madman," fumed the officer, laughing. "Here!"

Respectful but stubborn, the Jackdaw turned his head without halting.

"No use, my captain," he retorted. "The pretty filly can do anything, God bless her, but she hasn't learned to climb these rocks where I'm going.—Oh, and here's the bag for it."

Like a brown velveteen goat, he scrambled up the nearest rounding ledge, and stood inaccessible on the crest, akimbo and agrin, ready to vanish into the olive branches.

"Forgive me, sir," he called. "I had no other method. My friends are all gone. I needed a man of honor. It belongs with the toy of Charlemagne."

CHAPTER XVII

FAILURE

AVIGNON, a year later, was enjoying the clearest of spring days. In mild April sunlight the city of the Popes lifted her pale buff towers and crenellated walls along the river, as though rising to see how the pollard fruit-trees blossomed on the Island.

Against the lofty balustrade of the popes' garden a large black-bearded man leaned his elbows, and watched, far below, the tawny Rhone swirling past in freshet. He wore plain black clothes and a generous black felt hat.

"I wonder," said this man, "what the young monkey thinks he's doing?"

He meditated, his big gray eyes fixed on Rhone stream and the low mist of orchard blossoms beyond. One year ago he had lost a friend. This morning he hoped to discover the friend again, if it were possible after so much time and intervening difference.

"Young monkey!" said Blackbeard. "Whatever

he is doing, he's proud as Lucifer and twice as independent."

A brooding light in the gray eyes declared that the lost friend, for all his pride and silence, was not a displeasing object of thought. Blackbeard hummed an air, and beat accompanying tattoo on the balustrade. Avignon had waked and breakfasted, but remained very still. The skiff of the ferryman gliding slantwise across the yellow river creaked and rattled its pulley along the sagging wire cable, with a complaint as of a melancholy bird. When it had landed beneath Blackbeard's rocky eminence, and set ashore its freight of slow-moving peasant women, there was no sound but Rhone's voice. Fierce eddies boiled and gurgled under the arches of the broken bridge, and surged about the last pier in midstream, reflecting bits of glassy brightness, whirling like that round of the vanished dancers whose memory is but an old song. The watcher on the garden rock ceased humming, and listened for a while.

"I'll go now," he thought, rousing, "and catch him at work. If he is working."

So down from the garden cypresses, under the Palace battlements, under the Pope's Mule tower, downstairs, past valiant Crillon's statue, and into the lower streets of Avignon, walked a lazy giant with an air of preoccupied benevolence. He smiled to himself as he went.

“Will it be like old times?” he wondered.

Through narrow ways and a crowded marketplace, he came at last into the Street of the Dyers. Where once the scarlet cloth of army trousers used to flaunt was now a sad-colored lane of workshops overhung with budding trees. On his right, in a masonry channel, the olive-gray water of the Sorgue came suddenly and mysteriously flowing from under houses, to turn the cumbrous, clanking undershot water-wheels, their paddles coated with green slime. Like laboring monsters, wheel after wheel revolved patiently, dripping. Across the street their motion was continued, multiplied, accelerated in the row of workshops where through dark doorways came the hum and the fugitive glimmer of belts and pulleys rapidly spinning.

“He must be hereabout,” thought Blackbeard, peering through each door as he passed. Men quarrelled somewhere, with loud and terrible language.

Not far beyond the mournful chapel of the Gray Penitents, he spied a yet gloomier portal, from which smoke languidly drifted.

“There!” said the wanderer, quickening his steps.
“There, of course; that’s the boy’s sign!”

Above the smoking lintel projected a small penthouse box, like a wooden lantern, in which hung a bridle of scarlet leather.

“Poor child, I hope it brought him luck!”

To judge by the senses, it had not done so. Here the quarrel raged. The shop, blacker than an oven, was filled with stale, acrid foundry smoke, and re-echoed yells of rage. As Blackbeard gained the threshold, he was thrown violently backward by two interlocked and reeling figures who were belched out as from an inferno. In a zig-zag stumble they crossed the road, struck headfirst the wall of the brook, fell in a hissing, cat-fighting mass, then disentangled, bounded up, and sprang at each other with fists and feet.

They were short men, evenly matched; but the good-natured giant, lumbering into the fray, tore them apart.

“No, no!” cried one. “Let be! This must come to an end.”

“Stand clear!” howled the other. “Let me kill him!”

“Do it! Do it!”

“He stole my great treasure—gave it away . . . for nothing. Promised to make my fortune, and he can’t make the snout-ring of a sow!”

The two ruffians bobbed round their peace-maker, trying frantically to close again. Pale, sweaty, grimed like stokers, with blouses tattered and burnt, they seemed a pair of last night’s phantoms enacting by sunshine the fag-end of a dream.

Along the Street of the Dyers, neighboring work-

men leaned in their doorways to watch and disapprove, or popped out, shrugged their shoulders, and popped in again.

“Let me kill him!”

“Out o’ my way!”

The giant recognized both ragamuffins, despite their blackened faces.

“Why, Jacko!” he cried. “Philibert! Stop this at once! Calm yourselves.”

The blacker and worse burnt of the two flashed on him a beseeching look.

“One moment, Barjavel,” came the reply, in the Jackdaw’s voice. “No time for you now. This has been coming. He blames me for the failure of my statue. A year’s work. This is the Fight. Stand clear. We must finish on the spot.”

So saying, he dodged under the giant’s arm and flew at his enemy like a gamecock. This time Barjavel contented himself with seeing fair play. It was a combat great and grim, fought in silence. They hammered each other with savage good will, clenched, toppled exhausted, rolled on the cobblestones, got up, and hammered afresh. When they fell for the last time, it was the wild, smeared likeness of Jackdabos who wriggled on top and sat there.

“Had enough?” he panted. “Or shall I drop you into the Sorgue?”

“Lemme up,” croaked a dismal bass.

The dirty victor leaped on foot.

"Sorry, old man," he muttered, "but we had to maul it out."

The vanquished rose tottering, and wiped a pug nose that bled.

"I quit work," said Puig. "Hope to God I never see *your* face again."

And he went limping back into the cavern of smoke.

Jackdabos, or the torn and cindery devil in his likeness, drew himself erect and wearily filled his chest with air.

"You are welcome," he said, smiling. "Welcome, *monsieur le prince*——"

"Bah!" protested the giant, and wrung his hand. "Call me the old name!"

The youngster sighed with content.

"My dear Barjavel, it's very good to see you again. What can we do for you?"

Barjavel's big gray eyes twinkled with satisfaction. Here he had found the same old Jackdaw, nobody's darling, no man's protégé, poor, simple, yet ready to talk like a ruler of grand affairs.

"I came to renew our friendship a little," replied Barjavel, "if you care to try. I wanted to ask you both to come picnic with me on the Island."

Jackdabos gave a snort of delight.

"If we care? What do you take us for, Barjy? Half a mo'."

He plunged into the shop, and disappeared among greenish clouds of evil-smelling smoke. Barjavel, peering in, could see only an obscure wilderness of tools, boxes, heaps of sand, disorderly work-benches, dominated by the dome of a brick furnace and a huge, misshapen mass like a badly built ant-hill propped with scaffolding. The place was a fit grotto for Melancholia surrounded by her rubbish.

Jackdabos ran out, buttoning his jacket,—the same old brown velveteen, threadbare now, though neatly patched and brushed. Except that one eyelid was turning green and puffy, he bore no marks of conflict; and certainly no grudge, for his face was jubilant.

“Ready for picnics,” he declared. “We haven’t eaten or slept, no, not these forty-eight hours. Wow, Barjy, but we have worked!”

Blackbeard pointed at the uncouth anthill amid the reek.

“What on earth is that?”

The Jackdaw flung his hands apart in a gesture of defeat.

“That? My statue,” said he, lightly. “My bronze statue in its mould. A year’s work for nothing. We cast it as well as we could. Puigo says the alloy didn’t fuse properly. All we could get for furnace was a worn-out second-hand bell-founder’s dome. Mafeesh-fineesh! We have failed and are bankrupt: no more

metal, no more money. Come on, let us eat and picnic. We shall not make you sad."

Barjavel took the failure as a matter of course.

"You've grown thin," he said. "Where's Puig?"

"Old fool says he won't come," was the reply.

Barjavel turned and bellowed into the foundry.

"Philibert! Attend! We're going by the *bac* to the Island, then up the tow-path to a good sunny bank. Follow us when ready. We'll have succulent foods and the best of wine."

The grotto of Melancholy returned no answer.

"Leave him to sulk it through," advised the Jackdaw. "I feel this is a day of destiny. If the lady at Arles foretold us the truth, Puig will be happy and content, working for a man who has beaten him with hand and tongue. Or not. Let be. He must follow, now or never."

Barjavel accepted this philosophy, but in parting bellowed once more:

"Shut up shop and find us. L'île de la Barthelasse! Plenty of wine, old Philibert le Beau!"

A sibylline croak bade them go to the devil.

They so far obeyed as to leave, and wind their way happily talking through Avignon to the old walls and the river. There at the *bac* landing below the Pope's Rock, they embarked with a polite, sunburnt ferryman, who cast loose and let them drive aslant the flood. His pulley-wheel chattered and strained its

wire overhead; the clay-colored Rhone swept round them; while over the pink-tufted orchards on the island which they drew near, Saint Andrew's fort and Philip's tower rushed down-stream by illusion like castled mountains moving.

When the boat nosed into a mud-bank, Barjavel and his friend climbed out on the island shore. By the ferry cabin stood a man in rusty black—a waiter from some tavern hidden among the poplar trees—who bowed to Barjavel, and silently, by appointment, handed them a basket covered with a tidy cloth. Jackdabos carried it, as they set forth up-river by the old tow-path, now an intermittent sandy lane among bushes, with clearings and tiny sloughs where the crumbling riverbank had melted.

They walked slowly, but their tongues galloped; and as of yore, the talk flew roundabout and criss-cross, quartering large fields of human life.

"Of course," Barjavel was saying, "bachelors aren't the most unhappy in this world. I remember two sentences . . ."

Jackdabos laughed.

"Ah, that's like the old time!" he exclaimed. "How good it is to see and hear you, my friend! What text from what ancient father are you masticating now?"

The giant viewed him slyly, askance.

"One is of Juvenal," he replied. "It says: 'Noth-

ing is more intolerable than a rich woman.' And for the other, how wrote the son of Sirach? 'As the going up a sandy way is to the feet of the aged, so is a wife full of words to a quiet man.' "

Jackdabos chuckled.

"'You're always the same,'" he declared, with quiet affection. "But there are—cases—to which even your collected wisdom cannot apply.' "

They halted in a pleasant circular grass-plot, open to the river, but screened elsewhere with young thicket and the dry, golden stalks of last year's rushes. April sunshine warmed the new grass, and being reflected from the saffron flood, played with changeable, oozy lights among the green switches and furry tassels of the willows. Jackdabos, laying his basket on the bank, sat there cross-legged.

"By the way," said his friend abruptly, rolling down beside him and stretching at full length, "you remember Miss Moultrie? Nice girl, that. You'll be glad to hear she was well, and asked about you in a letter to my sister."

Jackdabos fixed his eyes on Avignon, whose towers dreamed above the hurrying water.

"Yes, I *am* glad." His lips moved with difficulty; the sources of talk froze within him; on this, the day of his failure, no news could have pierced him more cruelly. "She—she is kind. I think, perhaps—I'd better lay our tablecloth."

Dragging the basket toward him, he unfolded the white cloth on the grass, then busily set out in order the banquet which Barjavel had provided: a roast chicken, two bottles of wine, salad, golden-crust bread, and various dainties. He was aware that his host lay watching him sharply.

"You're not ruined yet, for you can buy more metal." The giant was reading his thoughts. "Buy more metal, and have another go. I'll lend you plenty for that."

Jackdabos looked up smiling.

"You are a friend," he answered, in a glow of admiration. "You follow a man clear into the little rooms of his heart, don't you? My dear Barjy, I'm grateful, but . . . But." He nodded, as if the word were final; then with strained, mathematical precision, arranged three heavy glass tumblers round the cloth. "I can't explain. I can't borrow. Every tub must stand on its own bottom. Very slow work. But you know, some things, like dying, and this—this other—a chap has to do all alone?"

Barjavel nodded with tremendous energy, and sat upright like one whose watching had ceased forever.

"Anyhow, can smoke with an old man, can't you?" he growled, and tossed over a box of sinfully bedizened cigarettes. "Humble yourself that far?"

So, in their warm retreat among the willows, they lounged together, relishing equally the savor of deli-

cate tobacco and the smell of a spring bonfire that drifted, like rank earthy incense, from where some island farmer was burning brush. They mused, and let the flow of the river carry past their thoughts in a trance, till conscious only of that yellow surface, here rippling into a line of shark-fin waves, there uncoiling strings of loud whirlpools, or suddenly returning calm and smooth, as an eddy that bore tiny matted rafts and jack-straw patterns of broken reeds, mingled with the numberless old wine-corks that bob in the Rhone.

"I'm sorry for Puigo," confessed the young man, out of this long contemplation. "I treated him shabbily about his gold platter. He took all that like a brick. And I did promise to make his fortune. *Ahi!* Our promises!"

A distant, mellow chiming floated through sunlight to their island. Behind towered hill and long ramparts, the Jacquemart of Avignon rang noon. Another sweet bell answered. When the music had passed overhead, there was only the fleeting gurgle of the whirlpools, and the whisper of an April breeze passing through the sere lances of the rushes.

A loud hail, from down the island, startled them.

Through a gap in the willows, they caught glimpses of the tow-path, a leafy tunnel chequered with pale-green vernal brightness. Under this a man appeared, running like a messenger. He stopped, hailed once more, then seemed to spy the two holiday-mak-

ers; for in a clearing against the southerly glitter of the flood, his black silhouette hopped off the ground, cutting a strange antic. The creature yelled some greeting, either of triumph or derision. Then he came jogging on sedately.

“It’s Puigo. Good.”

The sturdy little smith walked over their grass-plot with a determined air, till he stood between them. All mud and smut, he had done nothing to remove the stains of combat except wash his face; one eye was nearly lost in a puffy swelling, and his nose gleamed large and red as a carrot. In both arms he dandled what might have been a small baby wrapped in brown paper.

“It breaks every law of metals!” he declared, angrily. “That old she-dog of a furnace, hey, what, she did the trick after all! I smashed the mould to spite you, Jacko,—and ooh, your bronze, your bronze . . .”

The Jackdaw scrambled up, and stood waiting, deadly pale.

“All gone,” he stammered. “All wasted, I suppose?”

The smith pitched his brown paper nursling into Barjavel’s lap.

“No-o-o!” he blubbered, and fell on the Jackdaw’s neck. “She’s cooling. She’s perfect! Perfect!

Jacko, we're both—o-o-oh, hoo, hoo—we're both made men for life!"

He hung there limp in his partner's arms, crying like a naughty child.

"Look at the model, Barjy," said Jackdabos, over his shoulder. "'Twill give you some idea. You're the third person to see our model. The thing itself, of course, is made heroic."

He was too busy comforting Puig, they were both too shaken with work, hunger, and lack of sleep, to watch what Barjavel might do; but they heard the crackle of stiff paper being unfolded, and became aware of a mighty silence. He must be looking at that model, in black wax, which they already knew by heart.

Then suddenly they were crushed in a bear's hug, swept off their feet, and tossed aloft like playthings.

"Oh, my boys!" wailed the good giant. "This will live long after we are dead and gone! '*Le buste survit à la cité!*' Oh, my boys!"

Jackdabos was stuttering in the air, as he went up and down.

"Does it . . . does it b-b-beat Cellini?"

"Cocked hat!" cried Barjavel.

He set them down, dizzily; ran to the tablecloth, opened a bottle, tossed the cork to join its fellows in the brimming River of the Bull, and filled two tumblers with pale-red wine.

“Drink,” he commanded, giving one glass to Puig, and keeping one, “to our Master.”

They drank, solemnly. The Jackdaw hung his head, trembling like a tired horse. But next moment they had him at arms' length, whirling in a round upon the grass. Barjavel was singing for their dance, and the words of his song were:

*“ ‘My love, she’s but a lassie yet,
A lightsome, lovely lassie yet.
It scarce would do
To sit and woo
Down by the stream sae glassy yet.’ ”*

It was not on St. Bénézet’s broken bridge, yet no livelier dance was ever footed in Avignon.

*“ ‘But there’s a braw time comin’ yet,
When we may gang a-roamin’ yet,
And hint wi’ glee
O’ joys to be . . .’ ”*

The singer choked and failed, the round ran into a tangle, the three friends stood apart as it were admiring their own folly.

“Come,” ordered Barjavel at last, quietly. “We should eat.”

With a kingly ceremony, more than half-serious, he

led the shabby little brown-clad youth to the feast by the river's brim.

“Sit down before us, Jacko,” said he. “Where the Master sits, is the head of the table.”

BOLDERO



BOLDERO

I

ON a summer afternoon a young man drove his "delivery wagon" down a street of modern homes in the greatest of all Western cities. What city, research would fail to discover, for the epithet seems common in a land of clashing superlatives; all we shall ever know, therefore, is that the street was a broad gray blaze of asphalt; the most argumentative climate in the world, a heat smelling of tarweed; and the wagon a green-painted vehicle drawn by a skinny horse and blazoned with the name of O. Gumbinger, Grocer and Liquor.

The youth who drove the skinny horse was Indian brown, had large blue eyes, and sat erect under a teamster's gaudy parasol. He wore a drab army sweater, bought at secondhand, faded trousers, no hat, and somebody's cast-off tennis shoes. Yet he was not dingy. To look up at him while he rumbled lazily down the wide and vacant street, any foot passenger would have marked him as a cheerful, audacious

young man, whose clothes called attention to his body—a lithe, loose, capable body, good for boxing or football.

He took care of his horse; for at a street-watering pipe he drew up, and sluiced the poor animal with water from a dangling cylinder of canvas.

“It’s hot, Ribso,” he grumbled. “Don’t want you to catch the staggers. ’Tain’t my fault you got no pith in your bones. That’s the old man. He fills your manger with shingle shavin’s, claps green spectacles on you, and says: ‘Dear hossy, eat the fragrant new-mown hay!’ Devil with him, Ribso. Fat sop! He don’t even pay his men regular. Come on, *mon beau!*”

They went on down a broad street called El Dorado, or Argonaut, or Camino Golden Sunshine—the real name of which was Dull. The houses lining it all struggled to be unlike one another without success. Each was what the Western world miscalls a bungalow, and, in spite of architectural agony, could not shake off the fact.

The wagon driver pulled up before a stucco and cross-timbered marvel, two storeys high. As he leaned backward to reach a basket under the seat, he found a plump little gray-haired man watching him from the pavement.

“What?” said this gray-haired man in a very good

and humorous voice. "You're a Grocer and Liquor, are you?"

The youngster regarded him coldly, a serious open mind looking through great blue eyes.

"I can understand your groceeing," said the passer-by, "but what do you liq?"

He was a mere shrimp of an old gentleman, very refined and whimsical, who carried a library book under his arms.

"Don't know," replied the driver mildly. "I can lick anything in this street."

As they two were the only visible men alive, the little plump one laughed.

"True," said he. "I sha'n't dispute it. What's your name, my boy?"

"Boldero," replied the driver.

"Eh? No! Say it again."

"Jack Boldero is my name; America is my nation."

The old gentleman stared.

"No!" said he. "Certainly not. Is it, really?" And he dropped into verse:

*"To make your candles last for aye,
Ye maids and wives give ear-oh,
To put them out's the only way,'
Quoth honest John Boldero."*

The youth listened politely.

"I do love my Mother Goose," he commented. "Always made me quit crying. Haven't got a rattle or a sugar teat in your pocket, have you? My name's far from Gumbinger, anyhow."

The other chuckled, and for a moment stood lost in contemplation; then, waving his book toward poor Ribso the Beau:

"Are you," he inquired, "a veterinary dietitian?"

"No," came the prompt reply. "It's a case of malnutriment. All his calories just go to fodder up his osteoblasts; so it ain't no use feeding that horse. He's an osteoblastopath."

"Heavens!" cried the little old gentleman in delight. "Where do you find such words?"

"Public library is free to all," declared Ribso's driver, "unless you're on your way to close her against us now."

"So young; yet so saucy!" murmured his examiner, feigning grief. "My boy, I fear you're the kind that rises too early in the morning."

Boldero had found his basket and was busy telling its contents.

"Oh, I'm not the milkman," he grunted, "nor yet the milkman's son. Artichokes and a dozen of eggs. Pardon me, Senator, but I have an appointment, and the audience is at an end."

So saying he hooked the basket over his arm, stepped

on the wheel, leaped down, and made off, whistling. The old man, hugging the library book, watched him as he mounted a flight of concrete stairs and followed the tradesmen's path to the rear of the stucco-and-timber house.

"This new generation is extraordinary," sighed the little gentleman; then shook his head doubtfully at the osteoblastic horse and passed on.

Boldero, skirting a parched lawn impaled with palms like feather dusters, had already forgotten their conversation. He was thinking how hot the day was and how dull his present life, in which nothing ever happened. He had spoken one truth among the late nonsense. The Mother Goose name was honestly his own; for he descended from those strangely named pioneers—Sharpnecks, Leatherheads, Lovelocks, and Muchmores—who have wandered the Western continent so far and so obscurely, leaving less written history than Henry Pimpernell or Peter Turph or old John Naps of Greece, or "twenty more such names and men as these, Which never were, nor no man ever saw." He, too, was a wanderer, and though young, had taken more than his share in active matters. This running with parcels to back doors—an interlude necessary for the sake of money—began to pall on him. Nothing ever happened in such a trade.

"About time to get fired," he thought as he climbed

the back stairway. "Artichokes and a dozen of eggs. That don't give bottom to the soul. A man needs more thrillin' events, kind of."

He rapped at the kitchen door, and something like an event began to take place; not immediately. His knuckles beat a loud tattoo that echoed as through an empty interior and failed to summon anyone. Boldero poised his basket and waited. The back stairs, a brown-painted Jacob's Ladder much more humble and rickety than anything in front, went zigzagging upward to the second storey. No one appeared, above or below; but somewhere within doors a light shuffle of footsteps crossed a floor and ceased.

Jack rapped again, louder, and gave his professional whistle, a piercing version of the cockney slogan: "'Alf a pint of mild and bitter!"

It roused only echoes once more. He was about to empty his basket and leave, when a voice, floating like a ventriloquist's from no point especially, called out:

"Bring it upstairs, here. Walk right in."

He could have sworn that neither voice nor footsteps came from overhead; but the words being clear enough, he went up, carrying his basket. It was an untidy staircase, marked with grease; the dark side of the moon as compared with that effulgent face looking upon the street. A sack of coal lay slumped in a corner, petroleum tins waited on the next turn, and

the nasty gray head of a mop leaned out to sun itself from the upper landing.

“Double house after all,” said Boldero, “and kept awful sluttish.”

He tapped on the door at the upper landing, obeyed orders, walked in, and left his artichokes with the carton of eggs upon a kitchen table. The smudged copy of his master’s bill he laid beside them. As he did so another door opened, and a plump young wench in splendid garments burst upon his view. She had the face of a late Roman empress, and wore tall sky-blue boots.

“Well!” complained this lady. “Wha’ d’you want, walking into people’s houses?”

“Delivery, ma’am. You told me to come right in.”

“Me? I never seen you before!” said the empress. “You can leave it. But you’d ought to have more manners.”

She disappeared—with a bang and an odor of perfume, as spirits are said to do—while Boldero was replying: “Yes’m.”

More manners were what everybody ought to have, he considered as he went down to the tradesmen’s path. Women didn’t have them all, either. No—sure! Why, she was nothing but clothes to attract the eye of man, all sort of gaudy and rude, if you came to that. Yet she was right. He ought to have more. Just now he had answered a good deal too

smart and flip, and maybe offhand, when that little fellow with the public-library book stood asking him questions that, anyhow, were pretty civil.

“There’s something in being a lady,” thought Boldero. “And a man don’t need to show off all he can think of to say, neither.”

He drove down the empty street, consulting his list, and meditating humbly enough how much there was about this world to be learned just in the way of behavior.

“An awful lot!” he sighed.

It occurred to him that the voice which had bidden him go upstairs was not the empress’s rather brazen music, but an easy, quiet voice—a man’s. He did not puzzle over it; the thing seemed immaterial. As afternoon wore on, and he talked with other strange women in other strange and soiled back doorways, he found many such queer fragments of life occupying his mind.

After sunset, having tossed his final basket into the wagon, Boldero reined the lean horse homeward. They went ambling along the shadowy border of a small park where more feather-duster palms, driven home to the head, with a few exceedingly young maples and peppers, were clustered thickly on a lawn blighted with dying grass. Here, of a sudden, two men dodged out, spread their arms abroad, and caught Ribso by his bridle.

"Brown sweater and white shoes!" said one of these highwaymen.

"You'll do," growled the other.

And, before Boldero recovered from his amazement, both men hopped over the wheels, landed upon the seat of the wagon, and pinned him there tightly. They were both heavy, red-featured men, both sweating as to body, but preternaturally cool as to manner and speech.

"What——" began Jack.

"Oh, drive along!" replied the first gayly. "Next turn to your left. The station's round the corner."

Boldero stared at them. They grinned like old friends. Their clothes were nondescript, but by a certain hard lack of speculation in their eyes he knew them for police. They did not lay hands on him; there was no need; they merely sat close and wedged the captive in.

"Look here," cried Boldero indignantly; "I haven't done a thing!"

The gruff one of the two hauled out a plug of tobacco and bit it cornerwise.

"Pleasure along with business," he mumbled. "That's all you was doing. Artichokes above, and down on the ground floor a little odd silver and clothes and jew'ry, and so forth."

One disadvantage that honest John Boldero inherited from his rude forefathers was too quick a per-

ception of the truth, combined with inability to keep the truth hidden. A great light pervaded his mind. The man's voice hailing him so gently in the House of the Empress had been the voice of a man not wishing to be disturbed, and for good reason. Somebody ransacking the lower storey of that house had calmly told him to go upstairs.

"My golly!" he exclaimed. "But that was clever! Boys, I never could have thought to do it——"

His florid and sweaty companions nodded from right and left like a pair of cynical twins.

"Drive along!" they said. "You'll get plenty of chance to explain. The lady seen you."

Another failing must be imputed to John's family. He had, when disbelieved, a very hot temper. Now he called aloud upon some of the deities of mankind.

"You don't jug me for that!"

The seat of the wagon was a plain board with no rail behind. Therefore, when he rose up with a shout, and swept both arms in a backward blow, nothing prevented the two cynics from falling among empty baskets and bottle cases. They went over like men on hinges. As for Boldero, he leaped out upon the horse's hollow rump, thence to the pavement, thence under the curving palm-tree spines and across the lawn of the park. One gift his unhistoric tribe had begotten in his limbs—the gift of running faster and farther than Harold Harefoot, or a Zulu, or Tom

Longboat at his best. Under the young trees he flew from patch to patch of withered grass, round a muddy pond from the surface of which, as he passed, two white lines of froth sprang upward and spattered fanwise. A double report, the crack of firearms, mingled with this phenomenon.

"Shootin' at me!" thought Boldero. "They're a nice pair!"

He ran all the better, and was able now to collect his wits as he ran. No sooner had he reached the dangling palms at the far side of the park and ducked beneath their branches, than he became another person—cool, dignified, without a trace of hurry in his deportment. Along this new street men and women were going decently home, while children flew back and forth on roller skates, rattling over the asphalt. Here and there a man stood at gaze, hearkening doubtfully after the sound of pistol fire behind the trees. But no man, woman or child so much as glanced at Boldero, who, with a loose-jointed gait, like the tired workman he was, deliberately crossed the street and turned a corner. There, finding the coast clear, he flew again; then lounged into another street and walked soberly among the people he met till he came to a shop bearing the sign, "Victor le Retit, French Bakery."

Boldero opened the door and entered. It was his home. He slept in the basement there, with all his

worldly goods. The little shop exhaled a heavenly smell of good fresh bread, for M. le Retit was just placing a trayful of loaves on the counter.

"Ah, Jack," said he. "You are airy to-night."

He was a round short man, with flaming cheeks and very sensible black eyes.

"Yes, Vic," replied the fugitive. "I'm early. Police after me."

The baker looked, and saw it was spoken in earnest.

"Police? After you? Then they will not catch you. In this town they have no abi-litty."

So saying, he waddled from behind the counter, locked the door, and carefully hauled down the window curtains.

"We are closed," announced Victor le Retit. "Come now; tell me. I am sorry."

Boldero's blue eyes were very friendly.

"I knew you'd take it that way. You're a brick!" he said. "But the trouble is, I never did it."

He told in few words exactly what had happened.

"Oh, but," exclaimed the baker, "if you are the wrong man then the police are sairtain to catch you."

This opinion, placidly delivered, was quite serious. Boldero nodded.

"I lost 'em by the wayside; but, then, they've still got the horse and wagon," he resumed. "My boss will tell them I live with you. 'Tain't far. They'll be here soon."

Le Retit thrust back his white cap till it formed a halo round his flaming countenance.

"I will bail you," offered this cheerful saint.

His lodger grinned at him.

"No. The case looks too bad. That's enough. It's all they want, and they'll never catch the real man. He's too clever. I saw the whole thing before startin' to run. Thank you all the same, Vic."

For a moment they stared reflectively at each other. As they remained thus, footsteps approached without; somebody tried the latch and shook the baker's door. They stood rigid, motionless, listening in the darkened shop. Behind the glass and the curtains a voice grumbled; then the footsteps went away.

"I'm off," said Boldero promptly. "Can't have you losing customers like that. Half a jif, until I get my duffle ready."

He dove behind the counter, through the hot baking room behind, and down a steep little flight of dungeon stairs to the basement. His friend Victor followed closely, whispering to him to stay, to wait, not to be rash. So they reached Boldero's bedroom, a cell below the street, all dark but for two square portholes glimmering overhead at the level of the back yard.

Boldero lighted a candle on the floor and fell at once to work with brown paper and twine, making a bundle of his only good clothes. His long-legged shadow, Victor's broad and dumpy one, fluttered

back and forth on the bare white walls and ceiling. A cot bed neatly made, a battered alarm clock on a chair, and a very old set of bagpipes leaning in a corner were all the furnishings of the room, and all Jack's earthly possessions.

"There's the lot," said he, tying his bundle of clothes. "Oh, look! An old lady paid me her bill this afternoon." He emptied from his pocket, upon the bed, a handful of silver coins. "Will you send it to my lovely Gumbinger? He owes me more than that, but I'm no thief; it appears I'm only a burglar."

The baker looked very doubtful.

"What will you do, Jack, for money, yourself?"

The fugitive grinned.

"Who, me? I'm rich."

He slapped his other pocket, in which something jingled.

"It will not last you long," sighed his friend. "To begin the world with——"

"I began the world with less," replied Jack, "along about the age of one day old."

From overhead suddenly resounded a thundering knock at the street door.

"Eh? *Voilà!*" whispered le Retit.

"Time's up!"

Boldero carried the chair swiftly toward the wall, set it under one of the basement windows, tossed his bundle upward and outward into the night; then, with

a catlike spring and wriggle, he was gone. No sooner had his feet disappeared, however, than his brown face shone in the window.

"I forgot." He looked down, very serious. "How's my little Jeanne to-day?"

The baker's upturned eyes, black and sparkling, grew softer, younger.

"Doing well, poor child!" he whispered. "But she will stay in the hospital many days yet. It is lonely for her that I am a widower, me, and have to work——"

Boldero's face vanished. His feet and legs remained visible for a moment in the candlelight. Then his clenched fist came reaching down into the room. All this time the knocking at the shop door grew more and more violent.

"Here, shake!" said Boldero's voice. "Good-by, old one!"

As the baker reached up to seize the fist it opened, and a shower of coins, falling over him, spilled and ran wheeling about the bedroom floor.

"Buy her some toys and flowers, with *frère* Jean's love."

"My boy! My boy!" hissed Victor, amazed and protesting. "It's your all—your whole—your last sou. And you have left even your cornemuse. What shall you get on with? How to proceed?"

Boldero's blue eyes laughed down at him in a flash of good humor.

"Proceed? I know a magic charm for that. Here she goes. Look sharp: *Ek dum. Kubberdar.* One, two, three! 'Feet, carry me away from here!'"

The charm worked; with a twinkle of canvas pumps, the feet obeyed as though shod in seven-league boots. Victor, hopping on the chair, saw in the outer darkness over the black wall of a high board fence a flying shadow vault against the early starlight and drop silently into the void.

II

SOME months later a young man lay resting beside what minor poets call the great highway, the open road, the long trail, or God's green caravansary, in the Kingdom of Vagabondia. Put thus, the fact has a pretty and romantic air; but in plain language, the young man, very wretched and cold and hungry, was lying in a patch of sand and dead weeds under a levee or dike. His belly was empty, his clothing wet, his mind as dark as the landscape before him. A broken grove of young marsh poplars, gray-green and sickly, straggled along the levee bank to right and left. A pale river, like coffee mixed with too much cream, swirled angrily past this grove, and in a froth of twigs and bubbles and floating grass blades lapped round the lower sapling trunks. Beyond the river stretched another level dike overtopped by low cottonwoods: a wet landscape, cold, gloomy. Above the musty cottonwood foliage a strip of pale sunset glowered far away.

"This is what they call being your own master,"

thought the young man lying in the weeds. "Can't say much for it."

He shivered, and looked with disgust at his clothes, which hung on him wet and wrinkled.

"No; not much fun." And he hugged himself in a vain effort to be warm. "This is the way you catch fever and things."

Boldero's luck had failed him all winter. Tramping many miles through town and country, he had found little work and no fortune. It was a bad winter, and now the spring promised poorly. Behind this levee which gave him a moment's shelter from the wind, lay a town full of men as able-bodied as he, dozens of the needy, scores of the lazy, hundreds of the worthless who only serve to keep their betters from working.

"I don't seem to have any luck nowadays," he reflected. "And my shoes gone to pot, too."

The soles of his boots, in fact, were parting from the uppers. The broken stitches were beaded with mud. He was bending over to examine them helplessly when he heard voices talking near by.

"I don't want to play checkers with my nose no more," growled one.

"No chanst; no chanst," said the other softly. It was a hateful, false, persuasive voice. "Go git a poke in the ear, if you can't hear what I'm telling you. It's only old Door-nail Jimmy. Who cares whether he's here or there, alive or—missin'?"

Boldero quietly rolled over in the tall weeds, craned his neck, and peered in the direction of the voices.

Behind a poplar screen two men lay side by side on the bank of the levee. An evil, white-faced pair, they eyed each other with the distrust of men who believe nobody and nothing. The watery sunset lighted them as they argued there by the river.

"No gunfirin'," declared he who had spoken first. "Le's git down behind and lay him one acrost the peak. No gun, Fingers! I ain't goin' to play checkers with my nose for him."

The softer voice poured out a stream of meaningless filth.

"Look-a-here, Pill-Hop!" it said. "You no need to carry jail inside your head like that. All you do is sit up on this levee and watch both ways. I'll act it out; me, I'm the boy! If you see anyone comin', you whistle. There's the old fool started his fire burnin' right down among them saplings." The speaker pointed toward Boldero, who had barely time to dodge and lie flat under his weeds. "He's a totterin' old man, weaker'n a cat, likely drunk by now and deaf as a post. That's why they call him the Door-nail. He carries it round with him all the time. What better do you want, brother?"

The brother made reply in which nothing was audible except:

"I want a smoke, first."

"All right; roll one," replied the persuasive voice. "Go ahead. Roll two while you're about it, so's I'll drag at a cigarette with you, brother. But soon as we quit smokin' down I go and git the Doornail. I git him, un'stand? Dead as a Doornail, hey? Un'stand? That's a lucky sayin', too. Roll 'em. Your hand shakes like an old maid knittin'. Here, gimme your bag and papers, Pill-Hop."

Boldero looked cautiously through his weeds, a mass of cockleburrs and greasewood, withered brown. Beyond their trembling tops he saw again the two ruffians, lolling on the bank. The more resolute, who had last spoken, sat up and rolled cigarettes very knowingly. He was a long, lean fellow, with a great chucklenose.

"Can't afford to lose time," thought Boldero. "Do a duck out of here. I don't want to mix round in any murders."

He began sliding backward, feet first, down through the weeds that covered the levee slope. He went as quietly as a cat hunting birds. But, when he had reached a thicket of young poplars and could stand erect behind them, Boldero felt a sudden compunction. He was alone, weaponless, half giddy with hunger, so tired and damp and cold that his courage had run low. A fiend tempted him—the fiend that dances in an empty belly. His safest course was to steal away. Roundabout, overhead, the dark evening clouds

hung funereal, and seemed to warn him that he was alone in a land of murder. Nevertheless, he paused. Something else, not a fiend, warned him that if he tried to evade this moment he should be an unlucky man forever.

"What can I do barehanded against a gun?" he pleaded with himself. The answer came promptly: "You can't let 'em kill an old man."

This must have been his duty; it wore an aspect so glum and hard.

"Oh, damn it!" he sighed, and looked rapidly about him.

A few paces below, in a small clearing, a handful of fire burned on the wet sand at the river's edge. Beside this fire sat the dejected shadow of a man, with his back turned, warming his hands. The man, the curl of smoke, the intervening shadows—all stood out clear and black against the gloomy sunset.

Boldero raced down the levee slope and halted, facing the man.

The fire, though humble, cast a warm red glow on him who watched it. He looked up, a hawk-nosed, beardless, brown-faced little old man, with skeptical eyes.

"Can't hear a word you're saying," declared this figure in a toneless voice. "You'll have to speak louder. I'm deaf as a doornail."

Uttering the words like an old and tiresome formula, he continued to warm his hands.

Boldero laid finger on lips. He was forced to think very quickly; no one could help him. A sheet of wrapping paper, stained with mud, lay near the fire. This he took and with a half-burned twig printed upon it in charcoal letters:

“A COUPLE OF CRUMBS WANT TO KILL YOU.
SIT QUIET. I WON’T LET THEM. SIT STILL.”

The skeptical eyes, rimmed with heavy lids, stared at this legend for what seemed an age. They had plenty of intelligence after their kind. The sitter nodded.

“Threatened men live long,” he said in his strange, flat voice; then, grasping his chin with both hands, he contemplated the fire.

Boldero glanced hither and yon for a weapon. Not even a good stick offered; nothing but sand, a fagot of twigs, one large imbedded rock too heavy to be of use, a few rusty cans, two or three bottles, and half an old shirt. The outlook seemed desperate. But then, so was Jack.

There being no time for niceties, he fell back upon an ancient and dishonorable method. Seizing the largest of the black bottles, he knocked the “kick” off it upon the rock, then passed the shirt rag through

it and took a half hitch of filthy cloth round his wrist. This done, his mind became clear and ready. He tossed the charcoal warning on the fire, stole back into his thicket, and crouched there, waiting. All this time the deaf man remained still as Saturn's image, looking down into the flames.

Hardly had the paper caught, flared briefly, and died in fluttering ashes, than a footstep came down the levee. Boldero saw passing within touch of his bush the pale face of the big-nosed man. A cruel coward's face, it was wrinkled in a conceited smile. The fellow hummed a tune as he went, and twirled on his forefinger a bright nickel-plated revolver. It was his left hand he meant to use: his right seemed lacking or mutilated.

Boldero slid out from the poplar leaves. Underfoot the sand made all still. Four paces brought him within reach of the murderer's slouching back. He saw it straighten and grow rigid. He saw the deadly toy cease twirling and fly to position, ready. Even then, he could not bring himself to strike, for he had never hit a man from behind.

"Look out!" he shrilled, his voice dry in his throat.

The enemy bounded and wheeled in his tracks. His left hand flew upward, emitting a flash and a roar. He was lightning quick. Boldero, not at all slow,

with a good conscience and a free, loose-bodied swing, gave him the bottle over his ear.

He pitched into the sand, tumbled from side to side for a moment, then lay collapsed—a bundle of long arms and legs; a scarecrow with a red mask for a face.

Boldero tossed away flinders of broken glass, untied the rag from his wrist, stepped over his adversary, picked up the fallen pistol, and aiming toward his recent refuge, fired twice. Immediately a dark figure bounded from the weeds and went flying over the levee, performing antics of terror, like a clown. Brother Pill-Hop did not wait.

Boldero turned. The old man by the fire had not risen, but sat there on a charred stump of railway tie and regarded the outcome wearily over his shoulder.

“You’re a bloodthirsty young wilcat!” was all he murmured. “Is that carcass dead?”

With his toneless voice, he seemed to put the question to empty air. Boldero looked down. The carcass lay breathing.

“No!” He came and stood over Doornail Jimmy. “Not yet!” he shouted. “You needn’t call me names, either. I didn’t do it for fun.”

With some bewildered purpose of warming himself, he sat down by the fire. To his further bewilderment he found his whole body trembling, and began to

cry like an infant, with strange, long-drawn, blubbering noises, which he had no power to check.

"It wasn't any quarrel o' mine!" he wailed.

The old vagabond slowly rose and stood looking down through the smoke—a black silhouette against the river, the watery strip of sunset, and cottonwood boughs dotted with great nests and Druid bundles of mistletoe.

"Let carrion lie!" he ordered sternly. "Come! Courage, boy! You need some food and drink. Let carrion stay where it falls. If it's dead it will float off soon enough. The river's rising. Come! I owe you a dinner at least."

He stooped and picked the forgotten pistol out of the sand.

"Pawn that," he grumbled. "Pawn it, we can, for a dollar, anyhow."

III

THEY left their fire smoldering at the river's edge, left the scarecrow figure asprawl, and climbed to the levee top. Here a beaten path of hard sand tufted with Bermuda grass went curving as the dike curved, between poplar and willow boughs on the right hand and on the left acres of roofs. Like a Noah's Ark village arranged in a basin, the town lay sunk beneath them. Boldero and the old man walked above chimneys. Without, beyond the trees, they saw the yellow stream hurry past, below them, yet higher than the streets within.

Doornail Jimmy set an easy pace. Boldero, following, saw only his back; but he became conscious that this guide, unlike most wanderers, moved with good action, not slouching, and wore a coat which had been made to fit him long ago from well-woven stuff. Homespun, threadbare and faded green, it still was weatherproof, pearled with gray seeds of moisture.

He went along talking to nobody in his flat, deaf accent.

"Bloodthirsty young catamount!" said he. "But I owe you a dinner. Don't know why you should kill men on my behalf. Never saw you in my life. Quixotic!"

The far-off sunlight died beneath a cover of indigo storm clouds. While it did so, the Doornail turned his back on it and began stumbling down a divergent path into the city.

"This way," he muttered, "is where I live."

A Chinese temple raised the dragon scroll-work of its eaves and ridgepole to meet them as they descended. A humble joss house, built in old brown wood, with traces of weatherworn finery, it maintained under shelter of the levee an open door between two faded red pillars—the door of an exiled and forsaken faith, which yet flickered visibly from the inner dusk where pin-point lamps revealed a few tinsel banners and gilded godlings crowded among shadows. A gong shuddered once or twice with muffled overtones; and a bent, black-hatted figure passed before the altar like a weary ghost.

Into this temple the Doornail peered for a moment, then moved on, skirting its battered portico. Through an alley choked with greenish mud and queer odors he led the way, round a corner, through more alleys, to a ramshackle street lined with wooden verandas. Here, among the last and poorest shops of the Chinese Quarter, he paused. Flame-colored labels, marked

with vertical black ideographs, plastered the face of a brick wall in which was a little sunken door.

"Come upstairs," said the wanderer, groping for a key in his pocket. "Come up and have a talk."

He made hard work of unlocking the door; but at last it opened, and they kicked their way up a narrow flight of stairs, darker than a wolf's mouth. The darkness contained a medicinal smell of herbs. At the stairhead the old man seemed to pause and grope. Presently an iron latch clinked; a door upon the left opened and disclosed a room full of twilight.

"My lodgings. Enter!"

It was a little room, with one window, the walls of matched boarding painted an Oriental green. A table, three chairs, and a cot bed were the only furniture—all fairly new and commonplace, yet all transformed by that antiquity which settles upon the commonest Chinese belonging. A fireplace, empty and black, seemed ready to fall in ruin, with bricks askew. The window stood open to the fading western light.

Jimmy closed his door.

"Sit down over here," said he, dragging chairs to the window, "where I can see your face. Now then! Why didn't you let 'em kill me? You needn't shout. Talk naturally, or whisper. I can read lips."

Boldero sat facing him. Outside, the levee bank reared its wall of darkness, and a little grove of

switches, beaded with pussy willows, formed a network sharply against the sky. It was impossible to know the face of this questioner, who leaned backward into gloom, with one long, slender hand covering the eyebrows like a visor.

"I couldn't stand by and let 'em. Not in cold blood!"

"That's very brave."

"No!" Boldero rejected the compliment in disgust. "No, sir! I nearly ran away."

The man leaning in the shadow made a movement.

"Never do that," he exclaimed harshly. "Never run away from anything. It's the one great mistake. Go on. Tell me who you are, by the way."

Below stairs, in another part of the house, somebody was playing on a "Full Moon." The whining music, thinner and sharper than a mandolin's, penetrated the room and made an accompaniment to Boldero's history. He had not reached that afternoon's episode when his hearer checked him:

"Too dark to hear what you're saying. Wait till we have a lamp and some dinner. But it's the same old story, frying pan and fire. You jumped out of burglary into what decent people—not you and I, but decent people—call manslaughter. Remember that, my boy. Engrave it on the tablets of your mind, if you have a mind."

The window was a gray blank; the room and its tenant had become lost in obscurity.

"Go out and pawn this revolver," continued the deaf man's voice. "We can spoil the Egyptians a little. And here; take this. Get it changed for me."

Boldero, receiving the pistol, took also a round piece of money—gold, to judge by the weight, and by its breadth a double eagle.

"Twenty dollars!" he cried. "You trust me?"

The other laughed at his amazement.

"Don't know whether I do or not," came the dry answer. "Go out and see. Pawn that devil's plaything, anyhow. There's a Jew next door to the Acropolis Bar. Any of our neighbors will direct you. 'And mind you come back with the chynge—Me!'" A world-weary laugh followed this injunction. "Trot along. You can leave the street door unlatched."

Alone in the street, Boldero found himself a prey to mingled feelings. He had killed a man, and the fact crushed him; he had rescued a man from death, and the rescue seemed a trifle. This queer old creature upstairs, for whom his soul was blackened, cared nothing about it either way, but treated him like a child whose guilt or innocence was not worth consideration.

"What's the use," thought Jack, "of trying to do the right thing?"

Nevertheless, he went on his errand down the gloomy

row of wooden verandas. A few lighted windows here and there disclosed the brown interiors of shops where Chinamen sat talking soberly among tiers of red-labeled merchandise. He found the pawnbroker easily, for the Acropolis Bar stood bright and gaudy upon a corner and served to light up a dusty neighboring den, the front of which was crowded with guitars, accordions, carpenters' tools, firearms, and silver watches. In this den, over a smoking kerosene lamp, he quarreled with a talkative member of the lost tribes, a degraded and discourteous Jew, who at last lent him four bits for the dead man's revolver.

Thence he returned to the glaring Acropolis, where amid the smoke, heat, and sweaty wrangling of a hundred Macedonian laborers, he caught the bartender's attention long enough to have his gold-piece changed into silver. The Greeks had been paid off and crowded along the bar, drinking Dionysus brandy and jabbering something about a flood from the hills. He left them to their pleasure and regained the cool air of the street.

Halfway home, at the next corner, he met a group of three men. In this Chinese Quarter, this foreign refuse pile of the town, it was not surprising to find one of the men a tall Sikh, who stood very straight in an old khaki jacket and wore a pink turban.

"The Little Old Man," this Easterner was saying in excellent English, "who lives at the Black Door

in the Wall? Where is that door, please? The old man who cannot hear——”

“Ah, go to blazes, raghead!” growled the other two, and turned slouching away.

The Sikh looked after them, his brown face touched with the mild scorn of a man well used to such rebuffs.

“Straight ahead,” said Boldero. “I’m going there myself. Ahead; on your right.”

At the sound of his voice the two white men wheeled about. Boldero found himself facing his enemies; for the taller of the two was the big-nosed man, alive and grim, with a red-stained bandage under his hat and dried blood upon one cheek bone.

“Come along, Fingers!” urged his companion. “It’s that kid again.”

But Mr. Fingers advanced with a menacing air.

“I see it is,” he cried. “I’ll fix him now.”

Boldero cast a glance behind. The Sikh was marching on his way.

“No; you won’t!” he retorted, confronting the pair once more. “You’re not man enough.”

Something in Jack’s bearing, and a slight forward movement of his hands, bespoke such practised readiness that the tall man halted. They stood looking each other in the eyes.

“This ain’t no place,” said Fingers, “and my

head swimmin' too. But there'll be other places, don't forget that, son."

"Places are alike to me," stated the young man boldly.

"All right. We'll meet up." The other, wagging his damaged head, spoke softly, but with a relish of hatred. "We'll run acrost one 'nother."

Jack's eyes suddenly brightened.

"Now I know you!" he exclaimed. "Thought that voice was familiar. You were robbing a house downstairs"—he named the town, street, day and hour—"and sung out, tellin' me to go upstairs. Didn't you? We've met before."

The big-nosed man gave a start.

"Oh!" He fixed his look harder than ever. His manner changed. "One of us," he said gravely, "is meant to be unlucky for the other."

"Well," agreed Boldero, "don't count on me for your little mascot."

His foe remained thoughtful.

"One of us—meant to be—that's plain. I'm a-comin', Pill-Hop."

With that he turned, rejoined his fellow, and walked slowly away, talking as he went, and holding a broken, imperfect hand to the side of his face. As for Boldero, he strolled homeward under the dark verandas, chinked the money in his pocket, and breathed great draughts of the night air; his heart light, his

conscience free, unburdened of a dead body lying among the river bushes.

He entered the Black Door in the Wall to find a bright light streaming downstairs. His host's room, above, stood open to the landing, and gave out lively talk that ceased as he went up.

The little deaf man and the tall pink-turbaned Sikh looked at him across a table, on which a hot supper smoked by the light of four candles.

"*Wuh kaun hai?*" inquired the Sikh.

"My preserver," said the old man satirically, but not unkindly. "*Bolta jao.*"

The two went on speaking in a foreign tongue of which Boldero understood more than they could have guessed. They were ending some brief tale of a shipload of laborers, and more than once used the word "conspiracy."

"I'll probably get into a row, then," said the Sikh at last. "So"—he drew from one pocket a buckskin pouch, from another three or four silver war medals—"your worship will take care of these?"

The deaf man nodded.

"Of course! Good luck to you. And," he added, as the Sikh laid his valuables on a chair, "remember, Ghanda Singh, if ever you meet this boy again, he is a friend of mine."

Ghanda Singh's lean brown face wore a smile as he regarded Jack; his dark eyes twinkled with sa-

gacity; he seemed to be taking Jack's portrait and stowing it away at the back of his mind.

"Good!" said he, then gave the Doornail a very curious salute, set his lean legs in motion, marched to the stairs—the lintel brushing his pink turban—and, with a nod and another quick smile, went down into the darkness.

Greatly interested, Boldero stood watching while the old man opened a tiny door in the matched boarding of the wall, gathered up the buckskin purse and the war medals, put them into a recess or cupboard, and locked them safely away with a flat key.

"I was once in India," he observed, as though replying to a question. "Many of these chaps come to see me, passing through."

With that, he returned to the table, where supper smoked amid the candlelight.

"Take a chair, Mr. Boldero," said he; and when they were seated, began heaping Jack's plate with rice, chopped bacon, and cubes of white bean cake: "How much did you get from the Jew?"

Boldero laid on the table his pocketful of money—the Jew's pittance, two small coins, apart from the rest.

"You keep that," said Jimmy, sweeping the main heap toward himself and counting it carefully. "The Jew's money is yours, of course."

Boldero said nothing, and took the two coins back again.

“Satisfied?” snapped Doornail Jimmy.

His pupils had grown narrow and keen as a miser’s; yet it was no miser’s look, Boldero felt, that pierced him now, but something more human, more complex, in which the cupidity aimed at higher and subtler affairs than money. This was the first time they had seen each other clearly; and with a touch of wonder Boldero discovered Jimmy’s face to be anything but that of the drunken vagabond he had taken for granted. In the yellow glow of the candles it shone forth, withered, austere, with fine features roughened by outdoor wear, and pouched eyelids forming the triangular folds of age round a pair of glittering eyes. Neat-shaven, hawk-nosed, the old fellow seemed tart as a frosty apple and wary as a bird.

“Quite satisfied?”

Boldero nodded. His host fell to eating the rice and bean cake with great appetite. The only drink on the table was two cups of tea—covered cups without handles, Chinese fashion. The meal proceeded in silence; but when they had left the platter clean Boldero found those birdlike brown eyes fastened on him again.

“I like people who are easily satisfied,” declared the Doornail, “and my life is hardly worth a

great reward. I'm not ungrateful, though. Is there anything you'd like to ask me for?"

"Yes," replied Boldero, finishing his tea and replacing the cover. "Your name?"

"Heh!" The other chuckled as though more and more pleased. "Well, sir, you may call me"—Boldero perceived the choice of words—"you may call me James Weechurch, at your service. But what else? For yourself, now. What do you want?"

"I don't want anything," cried Jack, growing indignant. "Forget it, Mr. Weechurch. You didn't hire me to slug that hobo, did you?"

For the first time Mr. Weechurch smiled; and the smile brought a transformation, making his wrinkled face warmer, wonderfully kinder, almost young.

"No," said he. "You're my benefactor. We don't always like our benefactors; but I rather like you; though all I'm going to give you in return is what I've given you already, a piece of good counsel. Keep it, for it's beyond rubies, and a pearl of great price. It's this: Never"—he tapped out the words with forefinger on table—"never run away from anything."

Shoving back his chair, he rose, looked meditative, and drew from his waistcoat a large iron key, which he laid beside Jack's plate.

"With that key you can go and come," he continued. "Your meals here, your bed in the back

room. I make you heartily free of the house on one condition." He paused, and repeated with emphasis. "Upon one condition: that you hold your tongue and do not speak, outside, of anything you may see or hear in this house—not anything whatsoever."

Boldero, glad of a lodging in wet weather, promptly agreed.

"And now," continued Mr. Weechurch, "good night. I'm turning in early." He blew out two of the candles, gave the third to his guest, and, himself taking the fourth, crossed the room and set it at his bed's head on a wooden sconce from which he took a small black volume. "Good night. I shall now read myself to sleep from the dulllest book ever printed on this earth."

Candle in hand, Boldero paused at the threshold and hesitated.

"What's its name, sir?"

The old man chuckled and darted a glance of approval.

"Its name," he replied, folding his coat neatly over a chair, "is Philip's 'Beauty of Female Holiness.' Two hundred and fifty-one pages of poppy and mandragora. I've been reading it for a twelve-month and am mired in page thirty. You like books, then?"

"Yes, sir," admitted Boldero. "Some. Not many."

Mr. Weechurch sat down to unlace his boots.

"Can't have this one!" he cried jealously. "It's my nightcap, my posset, my door into the vast inane. Good night again, boy!"

It was characteristic of Boldero that, as he went exploring by reddish candlelight the strangely smelling corridor which led to his new quarters, he would not have exchanged them for a palace, or his evening's entertainment for all the theatres in Christendom.

"And he has good table manners," thought Boldero. "By watching I can learn to eat right, here."

IV

THE bedroom to which Boldero found his way and which his candle dimly lighted was a cavernous little place, filled with Chinese refuse—broad, varnished wicker hats, worn-out sandals; rusty hoes and trowels and spades; a wilderness of bulbs, roots, withered herbs piled in every corner, wreathed round the window frame, dangling overhead from a network of wires. It smelled of the earth, of pungent blossoms and juices not quite evaporated, but still breathing virtue.

Boldero placed his candle on the window ledge and sneezed. Over the counterpane of a neglected bed there were scattered little bundles of dried sea horses, like chess knights wrinkled with age. He put them upon a shelf before turning down the covers. It was a strange room, and Boldero gloried in it.

“What a lot,” said he, “to learn about this house!”

He flung open the window, blew out his candle, and slipped into bed. Though not a sumptuous couch, it was the best he had known for many a night. To hear rain splash and trample outside the window, to lie

so near a drenching, and yet be as dry as these clean-smelling herbs roundabout, enhanced his luxury.

“A heap to learn!” he mumbled, and so fell comfortably asleep, looking forward to great things.

He woke next morning with a sense of bright promise and novelty, though his room and the world were filled rather with a brown gloom than with daylight. Rain crossed his window in heavy vertical lines, like glass rods, which melted and broke into silver spray on the rusty iron of Chinese roofs, a green trellised gourd vine, the tiled cornice of the joss house, and a sodden courtyard in which a troop of Mandarin ducks, their varicolored feathers bedraggled and darkened, went waddling aimlessly among puddles.

“Fine weather,” he thought while he dressed, “to go looking for work.”

In the corridor he found, to his surprise, a band of yellow light crossing the stairhead where the door of Mr. Weechurch’s room stood open. As he passed he glanced into say good morning, and saw Mr. Weechurch still abed, sitting propped on pillows. Two candles burned low at his bedside, as for a wake. The old man’s head, in a pointed white woolen night-cap, which made him look like Marley’s Ghost with its pigtail on end, had fallen back. His breath came regularly and peacefully; his eyes were shut fast; his arms, clothed in the sleeves of a blue silk wadded jacket, were folded on the counterpane;

and his fingers weakly grasped a little black book. "The Beauty of Female Holiness" had done its work.

Boldero, smiling, was about to pass, when he saw on the table a thing that gleamed in the candlelight.

"Ho! This won't do!" he murmured, and stole into the room.

The gleaming thing on the table was a small scattered mound of money, silver and gold pieces; a large old-fashioned gold watch, with a heavy chain; a gold snuff-box; and a locket set with sparkling stones of different colors.

"He empties his pockets there and leaves the door wide open?" thought Boldero, staring. "This won't ever do! He needs a guardian."

Glancing from the little hoard to its owner, he had a momentary shock. For an instant he thought the old man's eyes had seemed open, watching him: but they were not; it must have been some trick of candlelight and shadow.

Boldero stared again at the shining heap on the table and wagged his head disapprovingly.

"Mr. Weechurch!" he said aloud. "Oh, Mr. Weechurch!"

Remembering the man's deafness, he stepped over and shook the footboard of his bed. "The Beauty of Female Holiness" tumbled from his relaxed fingers as lifelike as possible. The head and its goblin night-cap rolled gently from side to side. Yes, he must

have been asleep; he woke easily and naturally, his brown eyes wandering at first, then growing alert and fixed. With an effort of drowsy muscles, his lean face drew into a smile.

“Who are you? Oh, yes! Good morning. What is it?”

Boldero nodded at the pile on the table.

“That ain’t right, sir,” he declared in rebuke, “to leave a mint of valu’bles lyin’ loose, and your door wide open? You’ll wake up some mornin’ and find it all gone; or, what’s more, you won’t wake up at all. Honestly, sir, it ain’t safe at your age.”

Mr. Weechurch considered this advice with a look which seemed unnecessarily cunning.

“I seldom do it,” he replied at last. From Boldero’s serious young face he glanced toward the table; then yawned. “It was careless, as you say, at my age. Give me the watch, will you? And put the rest back into my pockets there. Good! Many thanks.”

And, humping his knees comfortably under the bed-clothes, he began to wind his great gold watch with a careful, preoccupied air. Boldero saw that the time-piece had a chequered shield and a pig’s head engraved on its broad back.

“What amuses you?” inquired Mr. Weechurch suddenly.

“Me?” The young man was taken unaware, for

he knew he certainly had not smiled. "Why—well—it seemed funny, kind of, to go and spoil a splendid watch by carvin' pigs on it."

His friend looked very much surprised.

"Carving pigs?" Weechurch peered at him as though he were mad, turned the watch over and over, studied it, then laughed. "Oh, ah, you're right. That pig is rather silly. Heralds cleverly disguise the absurdity by calling him a boar."

This speech left Boldero fathoms deep in mystification. Heralds? He knew heralds: they were old-fashioned military bandsmen, who used to blow brass horns and wear queer shirts like a couple of towels pinned together at the corners. They were all dead, anyway. What could a set of dead-and-gone buglers have to do with this pig on a watch?

"Oh, I see!" he replied, not to betray any ignorance.

But when, with a promise to return to dinner, he had shut the old man's door for him and stumbled down the dark stairway, Boldero found this puzzle heavy on his mind. He was hag-ridden by it while he ate a dime's worth of breakfast at an oilcloth counter, and even afterward.

"That Old Fox there—was he laughing up his sleeve?" Boldero could not answer the question. "Maybe it ain't him needs a guardian. Maybe it's me. After all, I don't believe he was asleep for a

minute. But, if not, now what was his game? Times I think he's deeper'n a well and smarter'n a whip; times I wonder if he's got good sense. A miracle he ain't been killed before I came along."

So thinking, he wandered the streets to look for work. Under the broad verandas he could travel dry, though the rain slanted its white lines down the streets and blew like smoke along the asphalt. Boldero had little hope of getting employment in such weather, but would not fail for lack of trying.

"I can't sorn on Doornail Jimmy forever," he vowed; "or try to live off what I done for him."

Proceeding in this frame of mind, he met immediately with good fortune. At the third street corner a round little bright-eyed man, with a florid wet face looking through the collar of a rubber coat, darted at him from somewhere and cried:

"Hold on, boy! Want a job?"

"You bet!" said Boldero.

"Look as if you could juggle a sandbag," snapped the little bright-eyed man. "Run up on the levee there, by the bridge; report to Mr. Breagan, and tell him the mayor sent you. Couple of dollars in it. Go after 'em."

Flapping a rubber sleeve in the direction of the river, he was gone.

"Thank you, sir!" cried Boldero vainly, and set off at a run.

High on the levee, black against willow tops and the gloomy sky, more rubber-coated men were hurrying back and forth, shouting, waving their flippers like penguins. Boldero clambered up to join them. A tired foreman made him welcome with great curses. For the next ten hours he labored mightily, wet to the skin but red-hot and cheerful, shoveling gray river sand into jute bags, carrying them on stretchers, piling them to form a bulkhead under the ramp of a wooden bridge. Half the time he stood in the river, which coursed violently, a muddy orange torrent hissing louder than wind or rain. Half the time he sweated on the dike above a scene of glassy-white roofs, with here and there a forgotten flag whipping itself to pieces on a bending staff. He went home after dark, thoroughly tired, and dripping like a water rat, but with a time card in his pocket.

"Heavens, young one!" cried Mr. Weechurch at the stairhead. "Are you come back from the bottom of the sea? Come here!" In a brown dressing gown corded at the waist, the old man stood, like a monk, before a fire that roared up the ruinous chimney throat. "Come in! Put on something dry."

He bustled about the room until Boldero, in a suit of Chinese woolen pyjamas and thick sandals, sat lolling before the live-oak blaze, watching his clothes steam on a chair back.

"Drink this." Weechurch shoved a tumbler into his hand and poured from a round-bodied earthen bottle a few drops of some angry-colored liquor. "It's the real *ng ga pi*, and will do your business."

The drink tasted like quinine, ginger, and earth mould dissolved in flame. Boldero coughed. Tears sprang to his eyes.

"Now," chuckled his host, "you feel like Ram Dass with the fire in his belly. Don't you?"

Putting away the earthen bottle, Weechurch drew up the third chair and sat beside Jack to toast his feet at the blaze. For a time neither man spoke; both enjoyed the silence and their hearth; till presently, what with the warmth and the effect of that potent medicine, Boldero found his nature expanding in a glow of kindness.

"Mr. Weechurch, I got a confession to make."

"Make it," said the monk, twisting his girdle.

Boldero considered.

"It's only fair. You've been darn' good to me," he began. "'Tain't every man would house me so pleasant and friendly. Treatment tells. This morning I felt inquisitivelike, and thought I'd try to find out more about you and your house. I'm ashamed of that now, sir; and, before we go any further, I want to own that when you stood talkin' with your raghead friend, Ghanda Singh, last night—well, I could understand part of what you two was sayin'."

The brown hermit started up in his chair.

"How much?" he asked. "Which part?"

Boldero told him fully and honestly.

"But how could you?" inquired Mr. Weechurch.

Boldero stretched his legs before the hot live-oak billets.

"Because," he answered dreamily, as though his short life were ages long—"because the first I remember, when I was a little stray of a boy, old Eph Bucklands, the tin peddler, carted me round Canada and New England on his cart. Eph said he went soldier to the East Injun Mutiny, whatever that was. He was a funny old feller, wore earrings, used to play the humstrum to all the dances, and win money on horse trots at the fairs. He taught me how to run foot races." Boldero's face shone with the memory of past delights. "Old Ephr'm allowed he could talk East Injun, and taught me bits of it, so's he and I could carry on conversation private, among us two. I was knee-high to Bildad then—no father nor mother; so everything come natural, you might say. We'd talk all kinds o' stuff right before people's faces without lettin' on. It made me kind of sly, maybe; but I don't want to fool you."

He stared at the fire and, therefore, did not see his companion's face; but he heard an altered voice replying.

"John, my son," said Weechurch, "confession is

good for the inwards. Now let me unbuckle a few holes." He laughed. "It was a trap I set for you this morning. I wasn't asleep. When you saw those gewgaws on my table, and walked in to wake me—well, you chose the proper course. Had you taken anything, you might never have got out this door with it, boy."

Boldero's eyes opened, very blue and wide.

"Was that it?" he cried. His face lighted with satisfaction. "I couldn't imagine why. You didn't seem asleep just right, someway, but I never thought of that, Mr. Weechurch!"

His monkish friend parted a smile between him and the fire.

"Call me Jimmy."

"I never once thought of it, Jimmy."

Doornail Jimmy shrank into his brown wrap, laughed again, and drew in his feet from the hearth.

"Now we know each other!" he proclaimed. "And it's time we ate some food. I saw you never thought once."

He got up, shuffled to the landing, and snarled something down the stairs in discordant Chinese.

"Time for dinner, boy," said he. "You must turn in early, and sleep hard all night."

V

HALF of this advice Boldero followed easily; but the other half was in the hands of fate. It seemed that he had hardly forgotten his aching muscles, and begun to dream of India-rubber men who flapped their wings like penguins, when suddenly a glare hurt his eyes and voices hailed him. He woke to find a figure from his dream invading the room—a burly man in wet rubber that shone red by the light of a lantern he carried, a man dripping like the drowned sailor's ghost in the ballad. Mr. Weechurch's face appeared somewhere in the background. Bundles of dried herbs and their shadows played phantasmagoria round walls and ceiling.

"Get up!" commanded the formidable lantern bearer. "It's the mayor's orders. He wants every able-bodied man up and out. Water's comin' in over the North Levee."

Boldero blinked, for this vision and these words had no meaning.

"Come! Up!" cried the stranger; and, lumbering forward, he grasped all the bedclothes by the

middle and whisked them aloft in one fist, like a conjurer removing the magic napkin. "Up, unless you mean to lay there drowned like a rat. The whole town'll be one bottom of a lake inside half an hour!"

With this gloomy prediction he dropped the bed-
clothes on the floor, and applied his hot lantern
chimney to the soles of John's feet.

"I'm comin'," stammered Boldero, and hopped out
of bed. "Which way?"

The black-armored giant rolled across the room, his
long coat rasping as he went.

"Ride in the wagons, if they ain't all gone," he
ordered, swinging his lantern in the doorway. "If
they are gone, follow their lights. North Levee.
Wake up and get that! North! See? North side of
town."

He disappeared, and ran thundering down the
stairs. Mr. Weechurch spoke in the darkness.

"Dress in my room," said his voice.

Candles and fire had burned low, but his little room
seemed too warm and bright to leave on such a dismal
errand. Boldero admired it ruefully. It was a kind
of home.

"What time o' night?" he asked.

Weechurch took down from a nail his famous gold
watch.

"The Pig says two o'clock. It's morning. If I

were younger I'd go. My poor old son, your clothes aren't half dried from yesterday."

Boldero found them warm, but clammy and leaden.

"No matter," he grumbled, as he rammed his legs through adhesive swaddlings. "I expect they need all hands. You go hop back into bed."

He opened his cap, which was like a cold pudding, and smashed it down over his head.

"We won't let you get drowned," said Boldero, grinning; "not if we have to fetch down the Ark off Ararat. Go to sleep, father."

He galloped downstairs and forth into the rain, happy as a colt to imagine he had someone dependent on him, someone he must protect. The notion sent his spirit mounting.

The streets were a vista of dead houses and glossy pavement striped with long blue reflection from arc lamps, past the blurred radiance of which fell numberless white streaks of rain. No wagons appeared anywhere, but wheels rumbled upon asphalt, far away. Boldero began running after them. "Can't let Jimmy drown in his bed," he thought. The houses, the lamps, the empty streets unrolled before him and drew behind as he raced along with echoing footsteps. Presently there was no more town, no pavement, no echo, and he churned heavily through mud, alone in the dark. Past fields, past the crowded blackness of vegetable gardens, along a flat waste

where the hiss and sputter of rain marked solitude, a tiny reddish spark trailed far ahead, guiding him northward. As he overtook this travelling drop of fire, he heard some wooden gear racketing; a horse coughed, an axle groaned, leather traces flapped loose and taut with a rhythmical creaking.

Suddenly Boldero splashed through a pool and saw heaving before him the stern of a wagon on which lay huddled men, asleep or dead. A lantern burned on the driver's perch. Boldero caught the tailboard, vaulted from a quagmire, and landed head first among these bodies of men.

They were not dead, for as he plowed into them they grunted and sat erect. A dozen voices jabbered at him. His friends of the Acropolis, the Macedonian laborers, woke to stare through raindrops and crossed lantern rays at the newcomer. "Georgi?" cried one. "Triantaphyllou?" said another. "No," a third growled; "American. What you wanta, heh?" This wagonload was all Greek and smelled ranker than cattle. A man whose legs dangled over the near front wheel began chanting a song without end—How Papa Oneiropolos Tamed the Wild Stallion.

*"Dream-Dealer bound the horse's mouth,
Ho, hey, a raging beast!
He roped his legs out, North and South,*

*Haul away, West and East,
Four iron shoes on a fighting beast!
The corn is up; the Lord arisen!"*

While this song continued mournfully—half improvised, half recalled from ballads and Easter legends—Boldero snuggled down into the wet, steaming mass of men. They accepted him, let him lie. Their cart labored on through mud and water. Rain pelted everyone. The singer lifted a young barytone voice to wail out the Dream-Dealer's long-drawn miracles; and to this Lenten music the town lights dwindled beyond a mile or more of darkness and waste land. Thus they came to the North Levee.

"Git out," said the driver of the wagon. "Here's Kellaway Grade Crossin'. Take your shovels."

At this point the North Levee was a long hillock of grass lighted by a feast of lanterns, and scarred with footpaths of orange mud. A road, trampled into paste, climbed this hillock to end in a rampart of sandbags. All the rubber-coated penguins of Boldero's dream were running about here, digging with shovels, carrying jute sacks, calling out commands, clambering up and falling down the levee side.

A round little fury, daubed all over with clay, charged among the unloading Greeks and shouted:

"Who's leader here?"

No one replied.

“Who’s your boss?”

Boldero recognized his friend, the mayor of the city.

‘I’ll lead ’em, sir,’ he offered, ‘if you’ll gimme authority.’”

The furious mayor wiped his eyes and grinned.

“Go to it, boy! You’re all right,” said he. “Take your mudhens up where the railroad crosses, and sandbag her good and heavy. She’s a low spot like this. No time to lose. We forgot her. Mind! You’re captain. Drive the work!”

Boldero waved an arm above his Greeks and cried, as though he had owned them all his life:

“Come on, fellers! This way! Shovels wanted. Fetch your sacks. Come on! Come on! Tumble up!”

They climbed the slippery bank among the clustered lights and made off westward, falling over a lumpy rounded battlement of sandbags. Before they had gone far, Boldero discovered that in his gang only two carried lanterns. He ran back to beg for more.

“Lend me a light!” he shouted.

The workers, busy with spades, handbarrows, picks, carrying-litters of lashed saplings, glared at him and told him to go to. In that turmoil they had no time to listen. He snatched at the bail of a lantern that stood perched on a heap of mud. Its

guardian shoving him backward, he stepped on what appeared to be solid ground, and immediately, waist-deep, went souse into the river. The invisible flood swirled round him, carried his feet from under him as he splashed and fought his way back upon the dike. A man dropped a sandbag to laugh breathlessly. Nobody else heeded him.

“Go to the devil yourself!”

Boldero, laughing also, ran off lanternless to rejoin his Greeks.

They continued stumbling in single file, and sang no longer, but cursed in perplexity. Between the darkness where the bank sloped inward and the faint shine of the river, to walk on these rounded backs of slimy jute was like walking over greased pigs. A few hundred yards of such going seemed as many miles. When the lights of the Kellaway Grade Crossing made a misty glare far behind, the string of men came down off the last sandbag, and not long afterward plunged into a depression where the path felt smooth and semi-fluid.

“Gorry!” said Boldero. “The river’s got over!”

Their two lanterns disclosed a thin, jet-bright layer of water stealing over the narrow path. The rails and ties of a disused freight line crossed the levee in this depression, which the flood had not overlooked.

“Here! One light here; one below!”

A broad-backed, sullen little old Greek understood him and shouted interpretation. Boldero grasped this man by the arm, electing him lieutenant and keeping him close.

"Half of 'em below in that patch o' mud to dig and fill sacks. Other half lug up here and pile. The man that don't work, I'll chuck him into jail—*eis tas phulakas!* Get me?"

The little morose man promptly nodded.

"Asklipios!" he shrilled. "Ithanasso!" He bawled names and orders in profusion through the rain. His countrymen obeyed, ran shouting down the bank, and quickly began to ply their shovels. "Eet ees no good, sar," he reported, with a gesture of despair. "The bags they air too haivy."

Boldero followed the gesture and became aware that his gang had neither stretcher nor barrow.

"Too heavy? Hell!" quoth Boldero. "Do it by main strength and awkwardness."

Through dripping tumbleweed and grass he slid down among the diggers, who lifted him on foot and stared at him, disconsolate, round the lantern ring in a mudhole. He grasped one of the full sandbags. Indeed, it sat too heavy. "Can't lift it!" he thought. But his men kept their eyes upon him so that he could not endure the idea of failing publicly. "Here; watch!" said he; and, twisting the "ears" of the bag, by a fearful wrench managed to whirl it a hands-

breadth from the ground, to crouch, throw one hip under, and swing the dead weight across his loins with a blow that staggered him. "Come on!" he groaned, crawling up the levee again like a foundered horse. "Come on!"

As he went splayfooting, he saw a fat old Greek hug another bag into the pit of his stomach and loyally follow.

The work had begun. They two dumped their loads near the other lantern where the water flowed thinly, and then came tumbling down for more. While they did so a flash of common sense crossed Boldero's mind.

"Half full!" he shouted. "Fill your bags half full."

The Greeks caught his idea, and laughed as men laugh to whom the obvious comes like an inspiration. There was no more hanging back. Half a bag of wet mud was no child's plaything, but they filled and carried busily. Within an hour they could see by the upper lantern a cobbled wall of sacks blocking the depression where railroad and levee crossed. Their defense was holding, and even gaining on the flood. Half an hour more of such work would render this point safe.

"Doing grand, fellers!" panted Boldero. He was a mass of slimy clay, so hot and wet that he felt parboiled. It would never do to show exhaustion. "Grand work! Where's your singer? Tell

him to knock off and sing for us. Music, here! Music!"

"Ithanasso!" bawled the lieutenant. "Sing for us!"

Ithanasso obeyed in the darkness, and began to chant again the wonderful adventures of Papa Dream-Dealer. He was encouraging the work, melodiously yelling something about a merry devil named Calli-cantzaros, when hoarse cries above, on the right, cut him short. A man came heavily running from nowhere to leap upon the new wall—a white face and waving arms in the mist of lantern light and rain.

"She's busted!" wailed this fellow. "Run for it, boys! The levee's broken both sides of ye! Run! She's busted!"

The wild figure fell among them, shouting incoherent orders to flee. With a great hubbub the Greeks dropped everything and ran down the inner slope of the levee. One lantern toppled, rolled flaming, and was smashed underfoot; the other, caught up hastily, led the whole rout, bobbing among a herd of legs and casting queer shadows that fled from under the scarred mudbank.

Boldero found himself swept along, fought back with his fists, tripped, fell, banged his head on a rail or the edge of a shovel, and rose blindly, with blood thickening the rain down his cheek.

"Come back!" he shouted,

He was alone. For a few steps he lurched after the lantern and its crowd of flying shadows.

"No!" he stammered.

The words of old Doornail Jimmy, the deaf man, resounded through his daze and told him to stop, to halt; never to run away.

"I can't do anything more," his weakness argued reasonably.

If the levee had broken, no man could be of service here. He had seen dikes break in other low countries, and perfectly remembered how a hundred yards of earth, solid as a hill, can melt, fall inward and flow like chocolate.

"Don't run!" repeated the ghostly voice. "It's the one great mistake."

He was alone with that ghost of morality.

"If she ain't broken," he thought, smearing blood from his eyebrows, "and I leave this part of her, why, she may bust right here for lack of watching."

He crawled back painfully, up the ooze of his deserted post.

"If we was soldiers we couldn't leave." The supposition more or less comforted him. "We didn't get no real orders. That cuss who came a-bellowing to run, his face looked unreliable, kind of poor white to me, and scared. Maybe he didn't know. Maybe he just heard a rumor and was trying to play Johnstown hero. Always is some fool like that!"

Boldero sat down on the unfinished bulwark. He was of a piece with it, water-logged and slippery. A noise of waters filled the night, until gradually night grew paler and paler. Tangible rain became visible as gray beads rolling down the mud poultice on his chest, down the woven jute and clay mush he sat on, down through the wiry globes of last year's tumbleweed at his feet. He waited, cold and motionless, except when lifting a hand to wipe from his eyebrows more blood, which ran slower and heavier now, as though freezing.

Dawn began to stain the darkness, a sour dull-green light that showed the curve of the levee. From the crossbars of a telephone line sunken in the flood without, batches of stuff hung like seaweed; treetops appeared here and there as islands, tufts of infant bushes; and all the rest of the world extended as a colorless lake without motion, though now and then some black object—driftwood or a dead carcass—passed in revolving flight, with sinister, gulping noises.

“What’s that?” Boldero drowsily asked himself.

It seemed impossible to keep awake, yet he struggled out of his weary dream to mark some dull gray thing crawling along under his thighs. He stared down at it stupidly. It had a slow, furtive movement, lapping, withdrawing, lapping forward again. Bol-

dero retained enough sense to know this crawling grayness for a fluid.

“Water! It’s water!” he croaked. “Round my legs, too.”

He nodded, blinked, and relapsed more deeply into stupor, when a sudden pang of meaning crossed his brain.

“The river’s over your sandbags,” he reproved himself aloud. “The river’s climbin’ over.”

This would not do. He stumbled to his feet and stared about him vacantly. There were no more sandbags anywhere to be found in that trampled gloom.

“Don’t run away!” came Jimmy’s warning again, like the words of a stern angel.

He remembered having fallen over some strips of wood near the diggers’ mudhole. Sliding and creeping on all fours, he found the place again—partly by sense of touch, partly by the glimmer of dawn upon wet boards. With numb fingers he chose a scantling, tugged from the inward mess of his clothes a pocket-knife, knelt down in a pond, and managed to whittle a few pegs.

His last conscious act—if, indeed, he were not dreaming again—seemed hopelessly involved with a board to be propped up edgewise on the rampart, pegs to be driven, a last forlorn kind of dam with which to oppose the deluge.

“ ‘Stay with it,’ says Jimmy,” croaked his guardian angel somewhere in the rain. “Bet your neck, old man! You bet your neck!”

Driving the last peg, he felt the wooden block with which he hammered fly from his parboiled hands. He toppled over the scantling edge, and, face under water, heard the world pass derisively away in a roar.

VI

HE woke in his old bed under the bundles of dry Chinese herbs, with their medicinal fragrance filling the room, though tempered by mild fresh air. His window opened on a heavenly blue expanse of sunlight, a boundless warmth of spring, in which he heard sparrows fighting and now and again the solemn quack of Mandarin ducks.

"Bad dreams!" he muttered. "I certainly dreamt some powerful bad notions."

With that, trying to stretch, Boldero felt his arms and legs refuse their function and dissolve in a weightless inertia.

"Been sick," he reasoned, aloud.

"Yes; but you're well now," replied a voice.

Mr. Weechurch, in his old monastic gown, sat bending over a table near by. He waggled a long paintbrush, and seemed to be coloring a picture of flowers on Bristol board.

"You're right enough now," he repeated, smiling across his work. "What was it?"

Boldero considered the few muddled remnants of his nightmare.

"Water on the brain, guess I had." And he laughed.

Mr. Weechurch's dry old face grew wrinkled with satirical kindness.

"A sop you were when they found you," he said, as he gathered up his paint box, his picture, brushes, and glass of many-colored water. "Now you go back to sleep again like a good patient. I'll fetch you some very high-class lunch about noon. Go on! *Fais dodo.*"

He tiptoed away to the door.

"Oh, me!" sighed Boldero, relaxing into a vast and comfortable weakness. "Seems it was true; seems I been the goat again."

Jimmy, departing, paused for a moment in the corridor—a brown hermit who grinned from a frame of darkness.

"You haven't seen the newspapers," he declared mysteriously. "Drop off, my young friend; cultivate the hay; or else I sha'n't fetch you anything to eat."

When Boldero roused again from a delicious nap the afternoon sun slanted through his window, and two men stood regarding him in his bed. One man was Jimmy, his thumbs under his monkish girdle, his eyes twinkling with satisfaction; the other man, a

grave Chinese elder, who wore a blue silken jacket and carried a tray.

"'I hop' you betto," squeaked the Chinaman in a quavering treble. "You not makee die now. You all lite, guess. Eat 'em some somezing, chinchee yo' blood, welly goo'."

It might have been only their kindness, yet Boldero fancied both men regarded him with warmth and liking. While he sat up to eat hungrily of strange but excellent food, they both watched him as in a conspiracy of approval.

"'Twill do you good, that aweto soup," said Jimmy, "though you don't know what an aweto is. Perhaps because you don't. Leung She understands how to cook, I believe."

"Mmh!" replied Boldero, enraptured and gluttonous. While he ate he caught sight of himself mirrored in the metal cover of a dish. "Hello!" he groaned. "Who put that kind of a head on me?"

His reflected likeness wore a scrub of orange-tawny beard, had sunken eyes, and was turbaned with a white bandage. He groaned again, beginning to recall the reason for this change.

"How do you get about?" he asked.

Mr. Weechurch frowned.

"Get about? There, there! Don't fret yourself with fancies. Everything's quite all right."

"Get round, I mean," persisted the invalid;

“round the streets. This town’s under water, ain’t she?”

“No; she ain’t,” retorted Weechurch promptly. “Dry as the back of your hand.”

The old Chinaman burst into a cackling laugh.

“He no sabe!” Leung She’s silk-wadded body shook with merriment. “Hai-yah! He fo’get on he head!”

“You sha’n’t inveigle us into talking with you at present,” declared Jimmy. “You’ve had a bad week—cold, exhaustion, lack of blood. Thought we were going to lose our man, one while. Now you just eat.”

“Eat, thasaw!” crowed Leung She. “He welly goo’ boy. Bimeby plenty stlong, allo same bull-cow. Welly smaht boy. Eat large food, thasaw!”

Boldero obeyed them and ate, laughing weakly, for he felt anything but like a bull-cow.

Not until three or four days afterward did he learn the history of this gap in his life. Then, sitting in Jimmy’s room, with his head bandage off, a pipe to smoke, and the song of a meadow lark from beyond the sunny mist of willow buds on the South Levee, he pieced things together; not quickly, but little by little, for sometimes his questions got a reply, sometimes none.

Jimmy wrote for hours every day, it appeared, as he was writing now,—with a huge pencil upon brown paper sheets piled a foot high. “A Chinese Herbal;

or, Certain Neglected Aspects of an Old System" was, he admitted, the title of his labors. He scribbled manfully, covered page after page with a large, clear handwriting, and seldom glanced off his work.

"Who found me?" asked Boldero.

"Several men."

"How?"

"With your head in the river," snorted the herbalist. "About daybreak. Picked you out for a drowned puppy. Carried you home in a wagon."

He wrote half a sheet, then added:

"Thought you were dead, myself, when I saw you."

Boldero waited till the sheet was written.

"But the levee busted."

Mr. Weechurch sharpened his pencil with a clasp knife that seemed larger than his whole person.

"No! Never a bust. Safe as the Bank of England!"

"What happened?"

The author stabbed knife into the table, turned his brown page, and drove the pencil with reckless energy.

"You'll hear all that to-morrow evening," he grunted over his shoulder. "Wait till I finish this bit about fumitory and glandular disease."

Nothing more would he vouchsafe, but wrote like a machine. The Golden Pig lay ticking among his manuscripts. At last he consulted it, rose, unbound his corded girdle, took off his gown, and put on

the worn homespun in which Boldero first had seen him.

"Four o'clock. Time for constitutional. You'll find plenty of books in the cupboard you haven't read. Go on getting well, for to-morrow I shall carry you off to an evening party."

With that, taking an old penang-lawyer for walking stick, he performed a sabre salute and went out, as it seemed his daily habit to do at this hour. Boldero unearthed a book and read until twilight, but with many pauses to revolve the questions which he had not asked or to which he had not heard the answers.

All the next day Mr. Weechurch labored under visible and catching excitement. His cheeks were flushed, his eyes flighty, his manners irritable. That great work, the Herbal, lay forgotten while he fiddled about the room. Leung She, who brought up their lunch, grinned like a Chinese earth god and viewed Boldero with twinkling almond orbs.

"All lite now," he chanted. "That boy he go catchee Goo' Lock. My can see one piecee Goo' Lock on he face."

Jimmy shook his head irascibly.

"Not on that face," he objected; "not until it's clean shaven. 'Lord worshipped might he be, what a beard hast thou got! More hair on thy chin than

Dobbin my fill-horse has on his tail.' Where the devil's my shaving tools gone?"

"In Yo' Honah' boots-bok," said Leung She, grinning still.

Jimmy flung open the boot-box and fetched from under many things a silver brush, a silver soap case, a strop, bottles of luxurious Corinthian lotions, and a morocco tray of Monday-Tuesday-Wednesday razors.

"Take those," he ordered peevishly; "apply them to your cheeks, and break the stubborn glebe. I want you to look halfway decent at my party."

Boldero took the barber's kit and the unjust rebuke with equal gratitude.

"Thanks. You needn't fret, Jim," said he. "I don't no more enjoy going dirty than what you do."

Mr. Weechurch suddenly puffed and swelled at him like a turkey gobbler. For the first time in their acquaintance he seemed to lose his temper.

"Look here!" he cried. "Don't you give back talk to your seniors. You shave off that horrid, sick, bog-trotting, luteous beard; get dressed, and be ready at eight o'clock sharp."

This appointed hour saw Boldero not merely ready but in a high state of expectation. Dressing, he had found his old clothes neatly restored—brushed, mended, and smelling warmly of Chinese flatirons; also, a new shirt, new boots, and very noble neckwear, lying on his bed, with a card, "J. W.'s Compliments." The

writer of that card, himself appearing vaguely beautified and twiddling his penang-lawyer, surveyed the general result with a sort of peevish gloom.

"Tidy, at least," he grunted, and led the way downstairs.

Outdoors, by the black door in the wall, a cab stood waiting with lighted lamps.

"Get in," snapped Jimmy; and to the driver: "You know where to go."

They trundled through the darkness of the Chinese Quarter, round several turns, into a bright and crowded street, then up an obscure alley. The cab stopped before a high, blank building, like a deserted warehouse, in which a single narrow door showed, lighted by a jutting lamp. Weechurch, who had fretted silently all the way, bundled Boldero out, through this door, and into a long, bare passage. Music, chiefly that of violins, came in muffled gusts from somewhere within.

A lame man, shuffling down the corridor, met them as though they were expected, and without a word ushered them into a whitewashed cell that contained two chairs, a broken box, a shelf, and over the shelf an aged yellow bulb casting a discouraged light. The lame man shut the door and was gone.

"Know where you are?" Jimmy sat down, then crossed his arms on the head of his stick.

"Theatre."

"How d'you know?"

"The smell."

"Humph!" said Jimmy, and began restlessly tapping his lawyer on the floor.

Minutes went by. The gusts of music died away; a distant murmuring succeeded; then came the crackle of applause; then silence. Jimmy continued to fidget, to beat his devil's tattoo.

"We in here for life?" asked Boldero, to check the growing despondency.

"Pull your cravat straight!" barked his mentor. "And, whatever they say or do to you, just keep your mouth shut. You'll look more compact. Bow or not, as you please."

While he uttered this dark counsel, they heard the footsteps of the lame man, who drew near and tapped at the door.

"Go with him," Jimmy ordered. "I'll meet you in the cab when it's over. Go where that man takes you."

Boldero, with a rapidly sinking heart, followed his lame guide through the corridor, which grew darker and stuffier as they advanced. Suddenly a door opened, disclosing a flight of stairs, up which they mounted into a huge, dim, drafty vault full of cordage and furniture, gray mounds and leaning slats of colored scenery. A few men flitted or lounged in this limbo. The lame one, twitching Boldero's arm,

led him to the verge of a brilliant inner space and held him there, tightly, a prisoner.

They looked from the wings upon a stage, where, alone in a gaudy woodland, a little orator stood arguing with great energy. He glanced their way, caught sight of Boldero, nodded, grinned, and went on speaking. Though he no longer wore glistening wet rubber, but sober evening clothes, his face, glowing above the footlights, was the ruddy face, his eyes were the ferret eyes, of that indefatigable man, the mayor.

“So, friends,” he cried in conclusion, “I’m glad to interrupt the show long enough to say that we’re lucky to be sitting here to-night. Some of us came mighty near being nowhere at all. We owe a heap of thanks to the people aforesaid who worked so hard to save our lives and property; but, most of all, we owe to that one man. We won our fight by a few minutes and, say, a couple of inches. The thing was that close, ladies and gentlemen. Well, the man who made it possible for us to win, to be sitting here to-night, as I say, was soul alone, hurt bad, a stranger, with nobody on hand to oversee him or to help. He hung on, friends; he stayed with it. I want you to see that boy. If he’d showed—er—shown the white feather——”

The orator lost his apodosis, which he stood fishing for on the green stage carpet; but he never found

it there or elsewhere, because a great salvo of heart-shaking applause drowned his confusion and filled the vault with thunder.

The little mayor lifted his honest round face, laughed, and made a gesture toward the wings. The uproar dwindled to a dead silence.

"Jack What's-your-name, come here!" cried the mayor. "Give us a look at you. Come here to me, you boy."

Jack's blood ran cold; but, before he could turn to escape, the lame man shoved him violently out from the painted tree trunks, and His Honor had him by the wrist.

"Let me intro——"

A roar swept all the rest away. Boldero, with knees unstrung, looked across a barrier of blazing lamps and saw a bottomless black concave filled with eyes, long foreheads, women's dresses, and row upon row of hands fluttering like birds in a gale. Before all this tumult, centered hot upon him, the flesh quailed and the reason took flight.

"Lemme go!" he stammered. "Lemme go!"

The mayor's grip was a handcuff.

"Speak to 'em. They like you. Speak to 'em!"

Boldero moved his jaws twice. No words came. The noise had ceased and left another waiting stillness, far more terrible. His throat went dry as a powderhorn.

"Thank you!" he squeaked; then, turning to his captor: "Lemme go!" he implored. "Jimmy told me to keep my mouth shut."

At that the place rocked with laughter. While he struggled to free his wrist, Boldero saw a man jump up in the black pit and throw something, with a loud cry:

"You're all right, boy! Chip in! Chip in!"

What he threw came flying over the footlights to jingle on the stage; other cries answered, with whistles and catcalls from aloft; the blackness above the dazzling barrier became thick with showers of money. One coin hit Boldero on his wounded forehead, a crack that left him dizzy; he tore himself loose and ran; laughter pursued him down the stairs and corridor.

He stumbled through the lighted door into the alley, thinking only of freedom. There stood the villainous cab, with its door open, and Jimmy watching from inside like a hawk in a padded cage.

"Well?" said Jimmy. "Climb aboard."

Boldero could not bring himself to enter. This man had dealt treacherously.

"Come! Tell us about it." And Jimmy, catching his sleeve, pulled him into the cab. "What happened?"

Boldero fell blindly on the seat. His companion waited, but he would not reply. Presently they saw

the lame doorkeeper come stumping out, cross the narrow pavement, and lean toward them. He carried a pasteboard box.

"Don't forget your testimonial, sir," urged the lame man. "Here's the—your purse the audience made up for you. It come kind of a surprise, didn't it? Guess you don't read the papers."

Jimmy reached out and took the tribute into his lap.

"Many thanks." He drew from the box a fistful of coins, which he bestowed on the lame man. "For you, my friend. Good night!"

The cab was rumbling among the Chinese shops before Boldero could find words to convey his bitterness.

"Jimmy," he shouted, "I never thought you'd do that—take a man there to be made a fool of, in public! You know I never did anything, Jimmy; not one thing. It ain't right——"

Mr. Weechurch's hand gave him a slap on the knee. Mr. Weechurch's laughter, not dubious now, resounded merrily in their dark confinement.

"John, I love you like a son," cried Mr. Weechurch. "You know the false taste of glory, which few of 'em can say."

Boldero understood him less than ever, but the words and the manner restored their friendship. Somehow, after all, there had been no treachery.

"You're going to work for me after this," declared

his friend. "John, I could trust you with Golconda! We've got a job ahead, dear boy, that will make you open your eyes and keep them open."

So saying, he unlatched the door of the cab. They had come home to the black postern in the wall.

VII

“How shall you lay out your fortune?” A fortnight after Boldero’s public fiasco, they were lounging in the sun beneath the only eminence in a flat landscape. It was part of the levee, a vivid green bank pied with new flowers,—harsh tansy-orange poppies, mallows with pink bells quivering. Spring, the hushed warmth of an April afternoon, brooded over the world and made all things doze. Jimmy sat smoking a briar pipe, looking beyond the green waste fields toward a cottonwood and willow grove, across whose lower branches a stripe of dried clay, putty-colored, and wisps of dead grass hanging frowsily, marked the vanished flood. Jimmy’s white bullet head was bare, his leathern face twisted into a comical gnarl of thought.

“How lay out your fortune? A neat round sum the grateful city gave its hero.”

Boldero lay prone on the slope, chewing a leaf of miner’s lettuce.

“I want to send that money to Victor le Retit.

He's a French baker. His little girl, Jeanne, is in the hospital for a long time to come."

"Not all of it?" said Jimmy lazily. "Half is enough."

"No," replied the herbivorous and stubborn young man. "Half ain't enough—the whole."

Jimmy thumbed the burnt rim of his briar.

"Very well," he agreed. "But don't expect to save a city every day."

"Oh, quit guying me!" growled Boldero.

The older man went on smoking; under their puckered lids his eyes twinkled like brown glass. In the wet, verdant field below, myriads of young frogs trilled silvery notes and gradually fell silent. Back and forth across one field trotted a pair of pale-blue figures, Chinamen balancing their twin baskets as they went about the ceaseless labor of making the waste a garden; whenever they stooped near a thicket of dark-green rushes, up flew like sparks and cinders a cloud of red-winged blackbirds. Far off above the haze, mountains lifted against a dreamy sky their overlapping billows of snow. A meadow lark sang gloriously, teetering on a fence wire.

"You promised to work for me," continued Mr. Weechurch. "What can you do? I mean, Jack, what can you do best—better than most men?"

Boldero finished his bite of wild salad and lay thinking.

"I can run," he answered with his face in the grass. "It's about the only thing; it's my one best holt. I never made nothing of it, you see; but I can outrun a good many pro's."

Jimmy chuckled.

"That's a gift," said he; and, again smoking, watched the landscape in which, for him, the voices of spring were dumb. After a time he roused. "What I shall hire you to do, my boy, is this."

Rolling over on his back, Boldero stared at the sky and waited. His face, browned by many such days of outdoor loafing, shone with cheerful health.

"First, about myself," began Jimmy. "You're too polite to ask me questions, therefore I'll tell you. In a humble way I'm what grander folk would call an Orientalist. Understand what that means? You needn't open your eyes so wide, for I'm not the Great White Mahatma, or a sinologue, or even a scholar; just a wandering, botanical, poor old pettifogging collector. Among other trifles, I've tried to learn about Eastern art. Do you comprehend? A-R-T, eh?"

Boldero had rolled over again and, with chin on elbows, lay watching the speaker intently.

"Pictures." He nodded like a sage. "Statues. I know all that."

Weechurch seemed to enjoy the conversation.

"Excellent young man," he cried; "formed for my

very purpose! You know Art. Well, as Boffin would say, do you like it?"

"Sure I like it!" declared Boldero.

His employer brought forth a leathern tobacco pouch that resembled a large and very aged mushroom.

"Why, then," he drawled, shoveling round and round with his pipe in this receptacle, "then you'll do. I want you to go to a certain place in the hills and meet a friend of ours. Understand?"

Boldero's blue eyes burned with eagerness.

"Yes, sir."

"This friend will have a certain Chinese painting, an extremely old Chinese painting on silk. Follow me?"

"Yes, sir."

Jimmy restored the mushroom pouch to his hip pocket, and continued:

"You will take this painting and never let go of it until you have brought it to me. But"—he suddenly threw off his indolent air, sat erect, and gave Boldero a look that went through him like a wimble—"but you will not say one word concerning this to anybody except me and our friend. Not a word."

Boldero, wholly absorbed, crossed his throat and spat on his thumb.

"There's my oath, Jimmy," he urged, with ardor.

Jimmy had grown deadly serious.

"Certain other collectors," he went on, choosing the words carefully, "would pay many thousand pounds to obtain this painting by any means whatever. Understand? Whatever! I can't give you more than a hundred or so; and you must guard the thing upon your honor, just as you guarded, the other night, this bank of earth behind us. The painting, a scroll, a *Tsou Shou* of the Five Dynasties, is about one thousand years old. I must have it. I—me—no one else. You'll undertake the job? Yes? Good! While bringing it back here to me you may have to travel on foot, avoid all towns, railways, and highroads. That shall be as you and our friend may decide best. Will you do that also?"

"Like a duck!"

Boldero began eating another leaf of miner's lettuce, not from hunger but excitement. This game, he foresaw, would be great fun.

"Not too fast!" warned his friend. "Don't rush into this blindfold. I tell you plainly it may be dangerous. You'll have to go through thick or thin for a hundred pounds—five hundred dollars, and you'll earn every penny of your hire."

"Sure I will!" cried Boldero, and sat up, thoughtful and ready. He looked like a sunburnt Mercury Resting, in old clothes. "Many thousands o' pounds? Golly! That picture must be big as all outdoors. How'll I carry it?"

Jimmy laughed.

"In your inside pocket," he replied. "It makes a roll no longer than your forearm and no thicker."

The young Mercury scowled.

"Sounds kind o' fishy," he objected. "A little thing like that? What's painted on it?"

"A picture of three cows," said Jimmy. "That's all, bar inscription. But those three cows hung in the bedroom of many emperors, and were admired by the Son of Heaven."

Giving this strange information offhand, he rose, stretched his arms and legs, clapped his hat on, then proposed a walk before returning home. As they rambled on their way he talked a great deal, but of indifferent matters; and during their many halts he remained lost in contemplation of the pale green valley floor, which stretched mile upon mile, palpitating with stillness, warmth, and the sense of growing things—a panorama of spring inclosed, far off, by snow peaks and the misty blue of mountain air. The larks and the frogs made an undercurrent of music fitfully, to which the deaf man seemed listening. Then he moved onward, with Boldero following him along the narrow path that curved slowly between fields and sultry market gardens toward the spires of the town.

Nearing home, Mr. Weechurch paused again, this time above the southern façade of the joss house. The sun blazed hot upon the old gilding and faded red

tablets of this dingy temple, and into its door, which stood open, as always, fronting a bank of weeds.

"Let's drop in a moment," said Jimmy. And he went down the seldom-trodden path to the steps of the temple. "Leung She may be inside here."

From sunshine they entered a blinding darkness and the thick, sweet odor of burning punk. For a time nothing was visible but the diagonal shaft of bluish smoke, in the doorway behind, and before them a wavering bead of flame; then gradually, as they waited, there trembled out from the surrounding dusk a concourse of tinsel banners, scarlet-hafted halberds with silver-gilt heads, baskets of dusty paper flowers, and on the altar a trinity of motionless gods, forever meditating.

"Not here," declared Jimmy in a lowered voice.

Boldero, seeing him remove his hat, did likewise, and felt ashamed to remember the contempt with which he himself had formerly viewed these things. It was a kind of church after all.

"Leung She?" said Jimmy, aloud. "No; he's not here."

But while he spoke a black shadow came shuffling from some inner door and approached them. The tiny altar lamp, that yellow bead of flame, shuddered in its cracked tumbler at the breath of its guardian's passage. Leung She—cook, janitor and priest—nodded and smiled upon his visitors.

"How too?" said Leung She amiably.

"You remember this boy?" inquired Jimmy.

Leung She's moon face expressed nothing but general intelligence.

"Shoe; I know um," he declared. "He you pardno; catchee Goo' Lock, I hop' so."

"I hope the same," replied Jimmy; and then, in a language Boldero could not understand, he spoke at some length, motionless, with folded hands, while Leung She listened, his wide pointed eyes blinking assent. "This boy," Jimmy concluded, "he my friend, my partner now. You treat him all same me, every time."

"Shoe!" said the priest.

There followed more unintelligible talk. Yet Boldero caught the drift and tone of it. This ghostly darkness, where at one step from living sunlight they had passed among the spirits of the dead, was a friendly place.

"Aw lite!" said Leung She.

"All right!" Mr. Weechurch echoed. "John, if ever you need another friend come to this Chinaman."

They moved out into the blinding noon, and so home to Jimmy's black door in the tile-capped wall.

Thirty-six hours later Boldero was traveling northward on a midnight train. He knew his instructions; but, as he dozed uncomfortably on a red plush chair

and listened to the half-drunken songs or dingy love-making of his fellow passengers, he tried to become letter-perfect. The affair should be simple enough. He was to leave the train at Hunter Landing, go westerly as far as Yellowhead's Flat, and there inquire for the Cash on Hand, a barroom kept by one Dalrymple.

He revolved these directions thoroughly; at dawn, in a cold blue mist, followed them; and so, after sunrise, came lugging his blanket roll into a village of old cabins, all asleep, which looked with blind, glittering windows down a steep gully of white-oak and bay trees. Not a creature stirred in the muddy red street; but there was no need to put questions, for he perceived at the uphill end of the village a brick hovel, leaning badly out of plumb, which bore on its front the half-obliterated sign: "... Express ... Gold Dust Bought Here;" and over this palimpsest of placer days a white board, proclaiming in black letters:

THE CASH ON HAND

FIRST AND LAST CHANCE

C. DALRYMPLE

Boldero walked up to its crazy veranda and opened the door. Inside, a low brown-boarded room contained rows of bottles behind a counter, three or four chairs, a card table, and the giddy clockface of a

wheel of fortune. He rapped with a dollar on the bar. After waiting a long time, he rapped again. The echo summoned at last from within a sound of boots; a door opened, and a paunchy but brisk red-haired man slid behind the counter.

"What'll you have?" he asked, with a tired professionalism.

"Are you Cassius Dalrymple?"

"Bet you!"

"Are you Cash on Hand?"

"And some in pocket."

"Then I'm a friend of Jimmy Weechurch"—Boldero recited his orders—"looking to meet a fellow from the North."

Mr. Cassius Dalrymple lost his cynicism, brushed his red hair all on end from his forehead, and stared.

"Are you the boy that Injun's askin' about?" he cried. "Well, say, you been expected! Have a touch to open the day? No? All right! You go straight on up the gulch till you hit his cabin. It's the only buildin' there; can't miss it. Same to you, and many of 'em!"

Boldero went out and up a narrowing path among the bay trees whose tops already began to sparkle in the sun. He thought a good deal, for his way seemed curiously prepared before him.

"This Jimmy," he reflected, "is some man after all, and wide known."

Where morning mist lingered and drifted downhill, the path ended, and he came to a dark board-and-batten dwelling in a clump of madroña. Smoke rose from its rusty chimney pipe through the peeled and spotted branches. He heard a stove lid clattering.

“Wonder who my next friend is?”

The cabin door, a flimsy piece of old carpenter work, swung inward at his knocking.

“Kya!” snarled a voice that made him jump.

The cabin swam full of smoke and pungent cookery. Through the reek a man came toward him with carving knife in hand, as if ready to fight. A pair of black eyes outstared him.

“Ho-ho! The boy!” cried this man, lowering his knife. “You are the boy!” He drew aside courteously and pulled the cabin door wide open. “Come in, Jack; come in! I having plenty breakfast for two. You are on good time.”

The speaker wore a turban of faded pink cotton and was wrapped to his ears in an old army serge overcoat. His face, grinning mildly through smoke, was the light-brown face of Ghanda Singh.

VIII

THE Sikh repeated his courteous motion. "Come in! Sit, and eat."

Retreating to the stove—an iron barrel red with rust, so cracked that fire showed every joint between the plates—he took a forked bay stick and stirred the bottom of a steaming kettle. Boldero sat on a box and awaited further orders. Presently Ghanda Singh poured from the kettle a great mess of vegetables into a tin basin, which he laid in Boldero's lap.

"There, boy." He brought an old tin spoon. "Fill your ee-stomach."

So saying, he went outdoors to pace up and down the path, and leave his guest in privacy. He had not long to wait. His mustard-yellow overcoat and pink turban passed hardly a dozen times through the morning mist, into which the cabin smoke poured and mingled, when Boldero called out to say his breakfast was gone.

"You have eat enough?" asked Ghanda Singh, entering.

"Great!" sighed Boldero, and warmed himself by the stove. "Thank ye."

"Good! Now I ask: Are you the boy?"

"What?"

"The right boy to come—not the wrong boy? How I do know. Talk."

A glance from soft Indian eyes told Boldero that proof was needed.

"I came a-traveling direct from Jimmy. He sent me yesterday afternoon."

Still those brown eyes betrayed a glimmer of doubt.

"You call him that? Who is he? Who are your Jimmy and you?"

Laying his tin basin empty on the floor, Boldero declared his instructions.

"Mr. Weechurch, then; he wanted me to come get it. He's a deaf man who lives at the Black Door in the Wall, and wears a gold watch with a pig's head carved on it. He's keeping your war medals for you. I saw you leave them."

Ghanda Singh laughed a pantomime of a laugh and rubbed his slender hands thoughtfully above the steaming kettle.

"Good! What is it—the thing he wanted?"

"A picture," said Boldero, "of three cows."

The Sikh removed his kettle from the stove hole, threw in some billets of dry laurel, and watched them

burn, while curving flames reached up toward him and an odor like that of lemon peel mingled with the smoke in the room.

"All true," said he. Replacing the lid, he dragged from behind the stove a white-oak chopping block and sat down upon its spongy head. "You are the right messenger."

"Don't know about that; but Jimmy told me to come fetch him his picture."

Ghanda Singh stroked his brown cheeks.

"My master knows best," he admitted; then, with a smile at once crafty and gentle, a rare smile that bore out his words: "You and me," declared Ghanda Singh, "we are friends."

For a while they sat, with the stove and this agreement between them. Outside their cabin door a bluish light cleft the gorge, a tissue of vapor and sunshine, a veil of illusion beyond which the mountain spurs ran their long gray-green beaks down in parallel series toward the hidden plain.

"Have you got it?" asked Boldero, breaking a long silence.

"No," replied Ghanda Singh.

Huddled in his greatcoat, he sat warming his thin hands by the stove. His brown eyes dreamed of something far away. It seemed he might wait thus for hours, when, without changing look or posture, he began to think aloud.

“No. Ramdayal is bringing it here.” He spoke as quietly as the crackle of the fire. “A long journey-going, those Three Cows. Some man he loot them from the great Peking Palace, how many years ago. A German soldier gave it to somebody for a bottle of beer. Then no more heard of it; maybe at Tientsin; maybe Wei-hai-wei—who knows? Then, long after, in Shanghai, a Russian sailor from aboard Askold sat up dead on a ricksha, all alone—dead, but very straight—in a snowstorm before morning light at Hongkew Bund. They never finding his coolie. Perhaps the Askold man dead of drink. But that coolie—I know how—he sold it to French barber for ten dollars and one bag Duck-Lily flour. The barber talked much. Stolen again. Gone!”

Ghanda Singh mused for a while, tucking folds in his pink cotton turban with neat, unconscious, feminine touches.

“Next a bank clerk, Ee-Scotch; he hang it up in messroom of his chummery. One night, some boy missing, the picture gone. Always gone; always change the hands. Too long to tell.” The Sikh sighed. “Too long; too many. Just now I heard that a man was carrying the Three Cows aboard one ship; a ship nobody coming landed from. No. But off that ship Ramdayal is bringing it to me, here.”

The Sikh rose, went to the door and, leaning out, stared down the bushy hill track. His gaunt figure,

against the bluish curtain of morning light, remained like a statue. His frowning eyes waited for Ramdayal to appear. Boldero felt a curious expectancy, a longing to know what man or what thing could be so late in arriving from the ends of the earth. Ghanda Singh, however, dropped one hand to signify that nobody was in view, and, without impatience, came lounging in to wait once more on the splintered cushion of the chopping block.

“Who’s the man coming?” said Boldero.

“Ramdayal,” sighed his quiet companion. “A brother of the Khàlsa. He was to come yesterday, but he is late; quait late.—Ramdayal and I, at home, we go together to the Akal Bungah, and there at one same time the priest taken for us the vessels from the Golden Ark. Ramdayal is my twin among the elect. You do not understand. No. It is too long; too many; too old. You are young man.”

Boldero, if repulsed, never knew it.

“What’ll we do,” said he, trying again, “when your brother does come?”

Ghanda Singh studied the cabin rafters, which, through the smoke, leaned broken apart with fallen ends that bristled full of nails like claws wrenched loose.

“We must go then,” he replied thoughtfully. “We must carry the picture home. Some man will stop us going if he can. We must run the faster than him,

using more brain inside our heads. You, me, Ram-dayal, we having more brain. He is a tall man, large nose, bad eyes, and three fingers gone off his right hand."

These words, uttered in soliloquy, made Boldero start up and look; for he recognized the mark of an old acquaintance.

"Middle fingers gone—that way?" Boldero held out his own right hand with only thumb and little finger displayed erect. "So?"

"Just so," agreed Ghanda Singh placidly. "Where was he?"

In a few words Boldero told how the two vagrants, Pill-Hop and Fingers, had attempted Jimmy's life one dismal evening by a river bank.

"Yes." The Sikh nodded, but continued to warm his hands without concern. "Fingers the Miner, that the name. He before tried to be a sailor; all talk, no work, no good at sea, now anything ashore like that—miner, mutwallah, sore-nose. The kind they hire to lay dynamite in buildings and crowds, then running away, blow women and children to pieces. Pah!" The Sikh's face curled into a light-brown mask of scorn, then became placid again. "This country full of such, God knowing why they are not all in jail-khana! He is a corpse-eating dog with the mange."

Nodding heartily, Boldero considered this information in the light of his own past; he recalled what Fin-

gers the Miner had said while Jimmy sat by his fire among the willows:

“ ‘He carries it on him all the time.’ Ghanda, your mangy dog thought Jimmy carried it. Was It the picture?’ ”

Ghanda understood at once, calmly.

“I think so,” said he. “They running ahead of the deer, then. Jimmy never saw this picture. Now they know that, they know better, and getting behind us, like cheetahs who are called in and hooded and put on again to the game. Oh, yes! They are coming down after us. Why Ramdayal is late.”

Boldero became skeptical.

“Those three cows,” said he, “must give a lot of milk among ’em.”

“Yes; worth more than seven lakhs,” returned Ghanda Singh. “The white color in the paint was grinded powder of pearl dust; the picture made by a queen, she die, she work one thousand years ago, in the lazy days when people made pretty thing to last and be good.”

A noise outside the cabin disturbed their talk—a rush of leaves parting tumultuously. Ghanda Singh jumped and ran for the door, his carving knife again held so ready that Boldero made after him with a laurel club. They saw nothing but a gray streak that overshot the path, some wildcat or mountain lion slipping like quicksilver down along boughs into a leafy

depth of manzanita and huckleberry. The beast, whatever it was, vanished. Again the mountain gorge yawned silent, a crease of rounded greenery among the hills.

They returned from viewing that deep solitude, and once more squatted by the stove to enjoy all the heat it could give; for a bitter, bone-chilling dampness breathed up the glen and filled their cabin. Ghanda Singh hugged his old army serge about him and shivered.

"Well, war is coming," he declared after a time, like a man who found mitigations in a rough life. "They say we shall have war."

"Who says that?"

"Many people," droned Ghanda Singh moodily. "A fat man with a white face—not a sahib—who sold beer and oil-tin fishes at the roalroad near Corindapur; he was of some caste that hated English and Americans; his little crazy gods told him a great war is coming and all India jump out of bed to murder the sahibs overnight. His name I forgetting—Freundlich or Geib, like that; and he was quait mad. Inside his head the weather always hot; his face turn red as bricks, his mouth boiled when he spoke about something not worth two pice and a half. Yet madmen can tell you what is coming, Jack; not the whole truly, the part. This one preached always war; great war, soon."

"You believe him?" asked Boldero, to pass the time.

"I think he was paid to say," replied the Sikh more cheerfully; but he began brooding again, and continued: "Maybe true. I think so after that ship did not land her passenger any up North. A trick."

"Where will his war come?" said Jack.

"God knows," mourned the Indian. "I can see, I will go there. Maybe it falling on France, the first time."

"France?" echoed Boldero. He said no more, but fell to ruminating this bit of news.

The eastern wall of their cabin, downhill, was now sliced by upright lines of orange fire among the boarding. Sunrise had stolen down from the summits to pierce the cracks of the hovel and cut its bluish reek into planes and slats of quivering light. The doorway shone like red gold; and through its frame the two men beheld luminous fumes of mist rolling up where spur after mountain spur plowed a whole world to make ready for the sun, the Sower of Day. Birds began to sing. A cañon warbler lavished his melody as if he could go on forever. Among laurel branches a highland blue jay perked his crest, twinkled his azure wings, and sounded his impudent call: Grrink!

Boldero and the Sikh watched him as he flew to another treetop.

The spray on which he lighted swung to rest; the

bird remained motionless and silent; yet they seemed to hear the quiet beating of his wings continue in the morning stillness.

No, it was not wings beating; it was a pulse, or a light clapping of hands, weak and regular. It was neither, but footsteps that raced up the path, and a panting like the panting of a dog.

The listeners jumped up just as a man stumbled over the threshold and pitched headlong between them. A little dark man in soiled khaki, he lay with his face on the floor and shook as though the violence of his breathing would rend him apart.

“Ramdayal!”

The runner turned limply over on his back, stared at them with hot, glazed eyes. He was bareheaded, and much oily black hair, loosened from its knot, hung round his face.

“*Juldi ao!*” he gasped, and lifted one hand in a beckoning gesture. “Come quickly!”

The khaki round his armpits showed black with sweat; his throat was a smear of blood.

“——’*mara . . . kâm . . . hogia!*” The words came as from a bellows. “My work is finished!”

And he dropped flat again, with his face on the rotten floor boards.

IX

GHANDA SINGH would have raised him ; but the man made a sign to be let alone, pillowed his bare head on crossed elbows, and lay panting like a worn-out dog, shaken with rapid panting, relaxed in a great heave, shaken again. Boldero watched him for a moment ; then stepping quietly to the door, looked down the hill track. It curved and crooked through glistening evergreens, a red scar along the cañon flank, blotted here and there by tree tops, but, on the whole, visible in the clear sunlight which poured under rising mist. Boldero studied every corner and every clump of bush. Nothing approached but the mist overhead. More than a mile away the reddish scar became a thread looping round a laurel promontory. Nothing moved in all its length ; neither man nor beast.

He leaned against the frame, watching indoors and out by turns.

The runner's breathing became gradually more human. At last he rolled upon his back and sighed.

"*Pani?*" asked Ramdayal plaintively.

A short, thin man, he was much darker than his

brother Sikh, more coarsely featured, with big, soft eyes, pouting lips, and even in this distress, a look of invincible rough-and-ready humor.

"Not dead yet," he groaned. "Give me a drink."

Ghanda Singh fetched him a battered canteen, rolled under his head the chopping-block, padded it with the old serge overcoat, and lifted him comfortably. Ramdayal grinned. He took the canteen, but only rinsed his mouth and squirted the water across the floor. His throat showed a fearful mass of red—part wet, part clotted.

"Look to his wound," said Boldero. "I'm watching the road."

Ramdayal squirted another jet.

"Who's that?" he asked. "Who's the young sahib?"

"One of us," replied Ghanda Singh. "That's Jack. Sent by the Little Old Man. Show us your bleeding."

The wounded messenger nodded, put down the water can, relaxed, and lazily unbuttoned his khaki jacket. All within seemed gore at first; but his friends were soon relieved when he drew his finger along the wound itself—a flesh cut from left shoulder to left breast. It had ceased bleeding, stanchcd perhaps by the salt sweat, which made it look worse than it was. A weapon, somebody's knife, had driven for the collar-bone hole, that three-cornered gateway

down into the heart, but had missed and gone glancing off the lean upper ribs. Ramdayal folded his tunic gingerly into place and laughed.

"They beat me with *lathis*, also," he declared. "But I not stopping, I come. Hey, brother?"

And he made Boldero a little jaunty salute.

"You're all right!" stated Boldero warmly.

Ramdayal, snuggling into the folded coat, winked both his merry black eyes, like a babe who cannot wink one singly.

"Yes," said he; "and I got it."

With that he reached under his right side and produced a cylinder of dirty brown paper about a foot and a half long, tied with piping cord, which he held out as though it were a diploma or an address of welcome.

"*Durust*," he chuckled. "No fear."

With joyful countenance Ghanda Singh took the paper cylinder.

"Is it?" he cried. "That? The Three Cows?"

Ramdayal nodded, shut his eyes, and lay back, a smiling picture of content and weariness.

"What shall we do?" said Ghanda Singh. He poked the roll into his bosom, rose, and came to consult Boldero. "How," he whispered, "we are going on?"

"Give me it and I'll run," replied Boldero, "while you look after Ramdayal here."

"No!" cried the other, frowning. "No!"

Jack knew his man then; good fellow, brave, faithful, Ghanda Singh had for their present need a habit of too quick suspicion and not enough foresight. Their need was great, moreover; time pressed; they must act, and somebody play leader.

"All right." Boldero, affecting to watch the trail, thought quickly. "Where's your crowd that's following you? How far behind?"

"In the bush, down," Ramdayal answered, like a man talking in his sleep. "By the railroad, last time of seeing them. Six; all bad ones. They break the bush over looking for me, swearing. They carry pistols."

Those railroad bushes, a vagabond-haunted thicket, lay not more than five miles away. Boldero knew the place of old and hated it. Ramdayal's pursuers, waiting there, could block the lower mouth of the cañon. "Can't go down," thought Boldero. "We must climb on up; take to the hills." If he took to them he must keep them, begin a hare-and-hound game southward along the mountains, one hundred miles and more of tough going, with only five head start.

"Able to walk?" he asked Ramdayal. "Slow, downhill, mile or two?"

The spent runner showed his teeth.

"Able, sahib? Yes. I can."

"Have you money to go on?"

A cunning light smoldered in Ramdayal's eyes to say that his purse was a private affair.

"Then take this note."

From a fly-spotted lithograph on the wall Boldero tore a corner of blank paper, on which, holding it against the door jamb, he wrote in pencil:

"CASH DALRYMPLE:

"Please feed and bed the bearer. On quiet. He is a friend of ours.

"J. W., per J. B."

This he read aloud, then folded and gave to Ramdayal.

"Go down to the bar-room, first building you reach. Hand that chit to the red-haired man. Keep off this path. Go through the woods, and mind you, to the back door of the red-haired man's house."

Ghanda Singh added a few words in some unknown tongue—perhaps a bit of slang from the Five Rivers:

"The shrub seller who is red as a panda."

Their wounded friend pocketed the scrap of writing, got up, buttoned the neck of his tunic, shook himself like a man half rested, and calmly stalked out-of-doors.

"My salaam to the Little Gray One Who Hears Nothing."

He wriggled under a branch beside the cabin and

disappeared as though the green mountain had swallowed him alive.

Such obedience, though more than Boldero had hoped for, he endeavored to take as a matter of course.

"Make up your baggage," he told Ghanda Singh, "quickly. You and me for the hills."

Again came obedience. The Indian squatted on the floor and folded his greatcoat into a neat and singularly compact roll, which he left open until he had gathered and laid inside it his black-handled knife, two tin plates, two spoons, a little cotton sack of food, the canteen, and a box of matches. His quick brown fingers made a pass, a loop, a knot; then the man rose, with a tidy pack hanging between his shoulder blades.

"Ready, go," reported Ghanda Singh.

Boldero swung under his blanket roll. Without so much as a farewell glance the two men slipped quietly out of the cabin, shut the door, and dodged upward from the path among the overhanging evergreen boughs. A steep wood mottled with shadow enfolded them. Young laurel trunks wriggled in snaky lines of gray and green; brown madroña limbs, smooth as a peeled wand or scabbed with curling tissue, upheld broad foliage glossed in the sunlight which they caught and obscured; while dead leaves, cinnabar dust, and sharp-cornered pebbles littered a maze of old runways made by wild beasts or by roaming cattle—false trails that began everywhere, parted, and

led roundabout to impassable walls of chaparral.

"We lose our way," grumbled the Sikh.

Boldero said nothing, but through this puzzle followed the black will-o'-the-wisp of his own shadow, knowing that it struggled upward and westward before the morning sun.

He climbed at a pace that kept his companion wheezing. The ground rose abruptly; underfoot the sharp-cornered volcanic pebbles rattled down like dice, and last year's oak and bay leaves, a dry, brittle carpet, slid away to fetch him on hands and knees; but the two men hurried upward, sweating, until a blue light pierced the tangled boughs ahead. They had conquered their first hill: like a strip of window, through irregular-pointed mullions, gleamed the sky.

"We're up far enough," Boldero panted. "Now south we go, Ghanda."

Turning at a right angle, he dove into bushes and tore his way through to sunlight.

"Now let's do a trot."

They stood all at once in open country on a bare green ridge that undulated southward, unrolling miles of upland turf crinkled with shadows. The mist had drawn aloft and melted. Clean as a polo field the long-backed hill ran, an oval park surrounded by mountain forest.

"Come!" said Boldero. "Let's jog."

But Ghanda Singh flatly refused to hurry. Halt-

ing for breath, he smiled agreeably and shook his turbaned head.

“No! Running is no need. Look!”

In climbing they had fetched a circuit round the head of the glen, which now lay hidden beneath its topmost trees as by a low hedge. Through a gap in the branches Ghanda Singh, with a satisfied air, pointed an arm down the cañon. It lay vacant under the morning light, a narrow crease among the hills choked with rounded laurels, like huge green sponges piled in confusion. Down through them zigzagged the reddish thread of the path, winding toward a white speck, far-off, which was Dalrymple’s tavern. Nothing in this vista moved but the shadow of a hawk—the bird himself lost in dazzling upper air—that glided with long curves across the greenery.

“You look? Nobody coming.”

“Why not?” inquired Boldero.

“You can see?” replied the Sikh, tolerant and superior. “Who is there? No one. The path empty.”

At this Boldero began to lose his patience.

“Of course she’s empty!” he cried. “Do you suppose they’d come up waving flags and blowing sirens for us? Come on here, my friend; a little speed.”

His companion, with the same provoking ease, walked onward some few paces, a long-legged figure of Oriental dignity. Boldero stood looking after him.

“If I’m going to have trouble with this fellow,” he

thought, "better have it now while there's time." And with that, striding forward, he overtook and confronted the Sikh face to face.

"Look here!" said he. "I like you well enough, Ghanda, and we can't afford to spoil things by a row. But"—he looked the man hard in the eyes—"we're making a wrong start. You give me that roll o' paper."

The Hindu threw back his head, staring haughtily.

"No!" he cried.

"Yes!" said Boldero quietly. "Hand it over."

The other made a slight movement, as though to reach a weapon. Boldero, having none, stood motionless but ready. Blue eyes and brown held each other in silent conflict.

"I'll take the paper to Jimmy. That's my hookum. Give it here. I'm not fooling."

It was the brown eyes that yielded. Suddenly, with a pettish jerk, Ghanda Singh tore open the breast of his jacket and slapped the paper into Boldero's hand.

"Give it to me properly."

This reproof, uttered in a casual way, completed the man's surrender; his body seemed to relax and turn supple; and it was with an almost bashful ceremony that he presented the dirty cylinder to his master.

"*Hookum hai, sahib.*" He laughed sheepishly and

rebuttoned his jacket. "Do not be angry. I was joking."

Boldero put away the treasure.

"I know it, Ghanda," he agreed. "'This was a g-o-a-k.' Now let's do a jog."

He spoke as if they had been arguing the weather, ignored his companion's embarrassment, and, with a tug to tighten belt and blanket roll, stepped off, running at an easy pace. For half a dozen strides he went alone; but soon, though careful not to look behind, he heard the Sikh overtaking him. Elbow to elbow they ran. Underfoot, spangled with pink mallows and tiny blond lilies of zygadenus, the grass invited them like a race course. Boldero gamboled along with plenty of action, performed in a mixed gait, and at every step rejoiced to feel sunny turf upspringing, to pass young flowers glinting with moisture. Yards, furlongs, miles, all distance became alike in the pleasure of running; this bare hilltop unreeled its length, a wavy green ribbon, a magic carpet for speed; while the morning breeze filled his nostrils cleanly in a long, abiding draught, the wine of motion.

Thus the two men sped along the ridge till it plunged into a forest from whose edge, while resting for a moment, they could look backward and see the billowy miles of greensward they had left.

"'The wicked flee,' " thought Boldero, "'when no

man pursueth.' ” That sunlit hill stretched away, empty of living figures. “But, just the same, we’ll do more fleeing.”

So all day they hurried southward by forgotten paths that wound among evergreens, now vanishing in a thicket, now burrowing under the windfallen mast of some great pine. Once they halted to lie on a bed of moss and munch dry biscuits; once more, where a waterfall roared through a wilderness of quivering spikenard leaves, to drink and to bathe in crystal pools, ice-cold, that smelled of trout; but after these breathing-times, refreshed, they trotted steadily uphill and down, disturbing a shadowy silence barred with rays of dusty green light.

Evening closed overhead as they crawled through a lonely pass where giant boulders leaned against the stars.

“No more, sahib,” groaned Ghanda Singh. “I cannot.”

He spoke honestly and humbly; he had followed like a true man; but now his breath came hoarse and his body trembled with fatigue.

“All right. We’ll camp here.”

A grassplot curved under the base of a torn crag. On this plot they flung themselves down and panted.

“I am very cold.” The Sikh, wrapping his great-coat round him, shivered miserably. “We not having a fire, sahib?”

There seemed no reason why they should not make a camp fire here in this rocky solitude. They had come fast and far enough, surely, to be alone, safe. Boldero gathered some dead brush, with a log or two. Soon a small but hot and clear fire crackled on the grassplot, twined its column of sparks up the crag chimney, and lighted round its edge a few wild irises that pushed from the grass their dark blue fleurs-de-lis. Ghanda Singh's turban, as he hugged the flame and chafed his hands, glowed with changeable color, now lilac, now orange. To see all this on a background of smoke and gray rock spires wavering toward the starry heaven, to smell the faint bitter-honey perfume of iris, reminded Boldero of some happier life that he had known before and forgotten.

"I wonder why we're up here doing this?" he thought. Until the present moment he had viewed his errand sceptically; but now of a sudden it became real, and he felt inside his coat for Jimmy's document.

"Let's have a look," said he, "at our Three Cows."

X

THE picture he unrolled and held up in the fire-light seemed a poor scrawl, without color, a three-foot vertical strip containing angular dark scratches haphazard upon gray. So Boldero thought at the first glance, and so much Ghanda Singh, peering through the smoke, implied as his final judgment.

“Yes, that being it. *Durust* was the word of Ram-dayal, who never telling lies—to me. Certainly the right picture.” The Indian regarded it with a mournful lack of interest, as he would have regarded the loveliest landscape on earth. “A queen made it in old time. Seven lakhs for that! Great money all gone. But the white paint is pearl dust—you can see, sahib—pearls grinded like curry powder. I suppose she wet them with tarpintel? Oh, foolish! What a waste!”

Boldero agreed, then doubtfully wagged his head, and, continuing to gaze, drifted under the power of an ancient charm. What his bodily eyes beheld was an oblong panel of silk, worm-eaten in one corner, the rest an illusion of faint coloring which, delicate and

subtle even by the firelight, showed three cows grazing in a slant hill pasture. His inward eyes beheld something more remote. Grotesque and peaceful, the creatures wandered in morning vapor, and, under a high background where fantastic pointed mountains loomed, wore that supernatural air of dawn, silence, and loneliness which can clothe brute life with wonder. The queen who painted them—dead, centuries ago—had left a miracle upon this band of silk. They were no farmer's cattle, nor even sacred heifers that a priest might lead with garlands and gilded horns to an altar; for their vague shapes outlined the greater mystery inherited, suffered, and transmitted from generation to generation by all the beasts of the field that perish. They were cropping fairy grass, drinking ghostly dew, in the forlorn light of ages.

Boldero felt some part of this Chinese magic dumbly.

"I can see why folks would like it." He sighed, and returning from distant regions to his own life, blew a camp-fire ash from the silk panel, which he rolled carefully together. "Yeah, I can see," he mused, putting it away. "Must be mighty valuable. Jimmy wasn't fooling me."

The knowledge reassured him, for until now his errand had seemed a doubtful, harebrained matter, too much like another of Jimmy's tricks; but here inside his jacket he carried proof and reason, a pre-

cious thing, real substance to be guarded. He sat watching the Hindu warm his lean brown wrists, from one of which an iron bangle swung and glinted reddish in the firelight. Both men were hungry, but not as yet sufficiently rested to begin eating. They drowsed by their little fire, while smoke and sparks drew up the gray crag chimney into windless night and the glory of stars. One clear planet burned above the void where lay the eastern valley.

“To-morrow”—the Sikh nodded toward this lustrous wanderer—“to-morrow we going there the way? Down, and travel the plains? We being safe.”

Jack saw no objection. Having threaded so much wilderness all day, surely they were free from pursuit and might descend into the lower country, where going would be easy.

“Yes,” he replied; “I think we’re safe enough now.”

The words were no sooner out of his mouth than he had cause to think differently. A sound from beyond the crag brought him upright, listening. It was a muffled sound that approached in a regular rhythm—the steady grunt-grunt of horses cantering on grass.

Boldero jumped into the fire, stamped it flat, and kicked showers of dirt over the coals. Then, fingering round the edges of the rock, he tore up a long scalp of turf and spread it like a mat over the embers.

"Come!" he whispered, as soon as he had made all dark and re-slung his blanket. "Here with me—lively!"

Noiseless and quick he wriggled up toward the gap in the crags, a notch of starlight among gray pinnacles. He heard the Sikh bound on foot, making as if to follow. But presently, when he crawled among boulders into the narrow mouth of the pass, he found himself alone there: Ghanda Singh, whether by misunderstanding or losing the way or willfully taking another direction, had vanished. Boldero crouched on a ledge of sharp rocks, and closed his eyes to get rid of the dazzling effect left by the camp fire.

"Fur enough for to-night," drawled a quiet voice that he seemed to know. It spoke from somewhere near by, under his rocky pinnacle.

Boldero opened his eyes. He could see clearly now, by starlight, a ridge of dark open country sloping away below the pass. Two horsemen, motionless, were halted so near that he might have dropped a pebble on their hats. One horse was white, the other a shadow alongside it.

"Fur enough," repeated the man on the white horse. "They couldn't 'a' hoofed it clean to here sence mornin'."

Once more Boldero nearly recognized this voice;

and the reply, in a louder and more whining tone, made it certain.

“Listen to me, Fingers. This here is Gunsight Pass. Reckon we better scrabble right on through, and then——”

“Shut your gap!” growled Fingers the Miner. His white horse gave way and started at the words, earning a curse and a blow. “You quit your yawp-in’, Pill. We got ’em headed off; got ’em bunged up in a jug. Through this here pass they’re bound to come, and by daylight to-morrer we’ll ketch ’em comin’, sure.”

The other horseman retorted under his breath something that was followed by a hoarse, whispering wrangle. Boldero could not hear what they were saying, nor did he wait to listen. Crawling backward at top speed, though carefully, he retreated down the rocks to the grassplot again. Their smothered fire reeked sourly, but gave not an ember of light. Where, he wondered, was Ghanda Singh? Unable to call or whistle, he could only peer roundabout and see nothing but gray rocks, the shadowy floor of the clearing, the black wall reared by the northern woods, all obscure and deceptive under the starshine. He had lost his companion. The Sikh was gone.

For a moment Boldero weighed his chances of overtaking the man: back to the forest, or downhill easterly toward that burning planet, they seemed equal:

and before he had chosen there came from the crags above a clink of iron and a rattle of sliding pebbles.

The horsemen were through the Gunsight notch, descending the cleft upon this side.

It would have been easy to make a grave mistake. Boldero nearly made it, then bethought himself in time: he darted silently, not down across the open, but up toward his approaching enemies. Among the rocks of the little pass he wriggled and lay flat, hardly two paces from the trail; there he waited, burying his face in his arms, for he knew the power of eye to attract eye, to call a seeker's glance to a hiding-place.

The horses, feeling their way down the rocks, paused beside him, so near that one hoof tossed a flint upon his blanket roll.

"I smell somep'n burnt," murmured Pill-Hop's voice.

The other hissed at him, commanding silence. Leather creaked. The horses went on, till their departing clatter ceased on the grassplot.

At once, before they were fairly past, Boldero had begun crawling on his belly up the Gunsight; now he rose in the nearest shadow and crept along the broken wall on his right, flattening himself sidewise with arms outstretched like a man groping in a blind corridor. Thus he climbed painfully, with every foot-

hold to be tested, every jutting cornice to be hugged, every loose block swarmed over. So he came into the nick full of stars at the summit, passed his former ledge, and, with redoubled speed but no less caution, lowered himself through the crowded chaos of the southern cleft.

"Blessings on ye!" he sighed at last, addressing the welcome turf.

Here at these rocks the hill-back was nipped together like an hour-glass; but before him stretched, widening, a bare upland, of what extent he could not guess. Far ahead the white star of the Lion blazed on high. With that for guide he gathered up his heels and fled.

"A narrow squeak!" he thought. "A darn tight corner! Ouf!"

The joy of escape revived him, as he ran, with an exhilaration keener than the night air. He forgot his weariness. Earth became a shadow that flowed behind like smoke, its contours melting and scudding, the touch of it underfoot recurring as a fleet pulsation, a thrill of speed. He seemed to race along a cloud, to breathe starlight and liberty.

This extravagance could not last long when a man had been going hard since daybreak; two miles of it, and Boldero, panting, came back to solid ground. He flung himself down, pressed his ear to the grass, and hearkened. Throughout the hill there was no

stir or tremor to be heard. He rose, however, and went forward at a long, swinging Indian trot which he maintained for an hour or more; only then, after laying ear to ground again, did he permit himself the luxury of walking.

"Slipped 'em," he concluded. "I hope the Hindu got away."

At the first clump of trees he halted, untied his roll, ate a handful of cold victuals, wrapped his blanket round him, and crept under a bush. Finding a dry, sweet-scented lair covered with a network of black leaves and bright stars, he fell asleep.

Dawn found him up and trotting through the gray mist like a patient phantom; sunrise lighted the water of the brook he bathed in; morning slipped away to the tune of leg over leg, the light, monotonous rhythm of good running. Sometimes he plowed through ferns in a tall wood; sometimes went sweltering up or down cañons, dazzled with the brightness and cloyed with the hot perfume of sky-blue lilacs. It was afternoon when he reached a bare hillside pitted with gopher holes, from which his passage frightened a company of small, light-brown hawks that left their watching in burrow mouths to soar aloft, as though the earth were spawning birds. Upon this hill he paused, for below in sudden depth lay the plain and the rest of his journey spread like a map.

"Now we must go pretty sly," he thought, scan-

ning this prospect. "We must use the headpiece."

Boldero sat down to a long study. Beyond the slanting flight of hawks he saw the valley floor as an apple-green haze reaching toward the lost horizon, where it broke into silver lakes and rivers—the last reminder of his old enemy, the flood—whose glimmer floated upward melting into the vague spring sky. North and south, east and west, a penciling of roads ruled the country into squares. Far away a gray stain in the air above a church spire no larger than a thorn point showed there was a town.

"That's the home stretch." Boldero, like a pilgrim on Mount Caution, learned the view by heart. "Hurrying won't do now. If those fellows headed me off once they can head me off again. In their boots, what'd you do? Certain sure I'd travel by rail straight back to the city, and lay waiting at the finish."

He would cross that living green map with extreme care, and enter that city with both eyes open.

Next evening he did so, delaying his arrival until after dusk. Where the levee curved its high path he came like any humble wayfarer,—a lean worn wilderness shape courting the darkest fringe of sal-lows, limping in their obscurity with a lameness half genuine, half copied from that tribe which he despised, the hobos. Thoroughly tired, Boldero nevertheless could finish; he had run his race, and

kept the faith, and brought Father Jimmy's treasure home. Only a hundred yards remained; he could reach the Black Door in ten seconds.

"Just what I ain't going to do," he reflected. "Now comes the pinch. When you're almost there and nobody in sight, better look out."

A glowworm hint of light spread up the embankment from an open door below. It was the door, the pillars, the carven gables of a quiet and friendly refuge—Leung She's sunken temple, the joss house. Boldero halted and considered that doorway.

"Play careful," some instinct warned him. "Don't overdo your game. Yeah! Leave her here. That's the right way."

He slunk down the diagonal path, between the two great red-and-gold tablets, through the door. Inside, the shadows yawned black and still, the point of lamplight floating in its cracked tumbler revealed the dusty embroidered banners hanging lifeless, the silver-gilt halberds in their rack, the sandalwood prayer sticks unravelling their dove-blue smoke toward heaven. Boldero watched and listened.

"Leung She?" he called quietly. "Leung She?"

There was no answer. The janitor-priest did not appear. Boldero stood alone in the gloom with the solitary lamp, and the firefly sparks and perfume of burning sandalwood.

“Leung She *ho la?*”

He heard the river flowing like a breath of wind behind its willow bank.

“Now’s your time.”

The place was lonely as a desert, dark and secure as the grave. He drew from his breast that soiled paper roll, now damp with sweat, which contained the dead queen’s marvel. Craning over the altar light, he peeped behind the shabby, gleaming idol, and saw what he expected; in a recess lurked two more images of the god, the third a lump swaddled in cobwebs,—the innermost god that would never march in procession, never journey abroad, but always remain at home, dwelling unseen.

He dropped the Three Cows behind its cobweb veil. The cylinder fell rustling, and a light cloud of dust drifted about the gods, past the altar flame in the cracked tumbler.

“There!” he sighed. “That’s all right for one while.”

And with a burden off his mind, he stole outdoors to the levee.

When a few moments later he stood by the Black Door in the Wall, his precaution seemed unnecessary. The lighted windows of Chinese merchants disclosed the street veranda as quite empty but for a farmer of vegetables who came hobbling, flat-footed, under yoke and panniers. No man lay waiting to

intercept Boldero; no one cared whether he came home or not; for the Black Door, Jimmy's door among the flame-colored labels, had a placard nailed upon it. The topmost words were printed in English: TO LET.

A strip of ideographs hung raggedly beneath.

"What's that?" cried Boldero in dismay.

The coolie with the panniers came bobbing past and amicably answered the question.

"Allo same hotel," he explained, grinning. "Say, you wantchee hylah some loom, go to sleep, you askee Leung She, you catchem, saw. You wantchee?"

Boldero wanted nothing. He stared at the placard; then at the basket-bearer, who went swaying on his business into the dark; then at the placard again. The bottom had dropped out of Boldero's world.

Mr. Weechurch's rooms were to let. Jimmy had gone.

XI

HE STARED at the Black Door as though it were the entrance of a tomb. To return successful and find his old friend gone brought all his belief and confidence tumbling into ruin. Father Jimmy had not even waited; the expedition led to nothing whatever; and this homecoming, this triumph of one moment ago, ended in a blank desertion far worse than failure.

The mood passed. It served to tell Boldero, clearly, how much he had grown to like the strange, deaf, eccentric little old creature known as James Wee-church.

"He wouldn't leave me in a hole." Boldero regained his wits and his loyalty. "Something's happened. Something's gone wrong."

Remembering that he owned a key, he drew it out, unlocked the Black Door, opened, and entered.

The stairway was darker than ever; his footsteps, as he mounted, seemed to rouse more echoes than before; and, though on the landing corridor both doors stood open, there came from the two rooms neither light nor the stir of living presence, but only gloom and emptiness.

"Jimmy?" he called aloud.

The question rang hollow in the dark. Boldero struck a match and held it up in the front chamber. Not so much as a stick of furniture remained; the shelves were swept clean, tier on tier; the cupboard doors leaned open. He carried the burning match into his own bedroom, and there, likewise, found an abomination of desolation; for, though the familiar smell of herbs lingered powerfully, not one bundle of them was left hanging. The match went out.

"Something mighty wrong here," thought Boldero.

He stood in the corridor, trying to imagine what had happened while he was away. The effort only increased his bewilderment and made the darkness in the vacant loft seem more disquieting; so he returned quickly to the front room, listening and peering about as though to meet some hostile watcher. Yet when he had found a candle-end stuck in its guttered wax upon a cupboard shelf, and had lighted it, nothing appeared in the room but his own shadow.

"I can't believe Jimmy would," he told himself again, less hopefully. A creaking noise on the stairway made him jump. "What? I left the door unlocked?"

The thought flashed through him with a premonition of something evil about to happen, about to arrive. Reluctantly, like a man forced by hypnotic

summons, he turned his face toward the doorway. Wavering there in reddish half light, not far above the threshold, another face watched him from round the edge of the casing. It seemed to float, bodiless and malignant.

“Don’t move!”

The words dispelled Boldero’s first conviction of unreality.

“Don’t move,” repeated a soft and drawling voice.

The floating face moved quickly upward. The man to whom it belonged had risen at a leap and cleared the topmost stair. Then, casual and smirking, Fingers the Miner lounged into the room.

“We traveled a long ways to meet, which wasn’t necessary,” he averred with dry sarcasm. “I guess maybe we’ll quit dodgin’ wu’nuther now, and talk business comfortable. Saves time.” He closed the door, then leaned against it, with hands in pockets and a grim pretence of being entirely at ease. “Too bad you run so hard, son. Kinder look tucked up and famished. What scairt you, anyhow? You and me’s good old friends.”

There was no chance of persuading or outwitting him, Boldero knew at once. The long, shabby, ill-favored man, lolling there so awkward, had no such foible as mercy. The candle stood too far away: impossible to blow it out.

"Talk for yourself." Boldero girded up the loins of his spirit. "I pick my own friends."

Fingers the Miner smiled, or at least a pair of bending lines furrowed his hard cheeks. If the man felt any visitings of humor it was a cold-blooded humor, a cruel conceit prompted by the knowledge that he held the upper hand.

"Is 'at so?" he drawled. "You select 'em, do ye? Well, I don't admire your powers o' choice. Call yourself an Amurrican, and go pickin' up raghead niggers and Chinks and Britishers? A hell of an Amurrican, you are! Time you knowed better. But you're young; and if you live"—he paused at the word ominously—"if you live you will know better, and maybe come to learn the principles of pattrytism and who your natural friends are. Un'stand? Now you look at me, right in the face."

"It won't do my eyesight no good," said Boldero, adopting his foe's language and inflection.

As he backed away to sit down on the window ledge, Fingers the Miner started, then relaxed.

"Don't go makin' sudden moves like that," he advised. "They ain't healthy. Don't move to-wards the candle."

A brief silence followed. The man's lean jaws worked as though he were chewing the cud of self-satisfaction.

"But we was meetin' here to talk business," he

began presently. "Come, now! Fork out! You know what I mean. Hand her over."

Boldero laughed. Like a woman, he had only his tongue for defense; and therefore he would use it freely.

"I handed her over long ago," he replied. "You're late for the fair. I gave her to Jimmy."

His adversary's eyes narrowed and shone red as a dog's against the candlelight.

"A lie; and a mighty weak-jointed lie too. Wha' d'ye take me for—a sucklin' babe? You jest got here to-night. You was off cavortin' over the hills when Jimmy died."

Boldero's acting failed him; the shock was too great, the pang too like a physical wrenching at the heart.

"Jimmy—— What?"

It was the turn of Fingers to laugh, which he did sourly.

"Ought to foller the news," he said, "afore you lie. You didn't know Jimmy was dead? Look round ye. He's a Doornail all right. The Chinaman carted off and sold his furniture yesterday. See for yourself."

The man drew a cigar, gnawed the end off, spat, and lighted a match. Every motion of this performance, his trick of rolling the cigar in his mouth while he smoked, was cruel, vulgar, and threatening.

"Dead as a Doornail! Yeah; that's the word, boy.

Jimmy lays out in his Chinese buryin' ground, six feet below, deeper than he was when livin'. What you s'pose? He couldn't hear ye now, not even if you yelled."

Smirking vaguely round, as if the room contained an audience that approved him, the cynic fetched from his pocket a long clasp knife, an eight-inch rod of staghorn. He opened it thoughtfully. Its pointed blade, of the kind that hunters use for the skinning of deer, flashed while he tried the edge on his thumb-nail.

"Not even if you yelled," he repeated, and stabbed the knife backward into the casing of the door so that its haft remained stuck at his hip. "So now gimme your picture," he said.

Stab, look, and words left nothing to be misunderstood of the man's intention. He meant murder. His lolling there against the door was only a pose, a bit of cat-and-mouse play to heighten his own enjoyment. At another time Boldero might have yielded to the suggestion of dread; but now he rather recognized than felt it, for his mind was numb. If Jimmy were dead, what else could matter? The world belonged to the powers of evil after all; so why go on laboring and struggling? In this black hole where the candle streamed and two shadows bickered on the wall, presently one shadow would die. Weariness of body had become weariness of soul. He

sat on his window ledge without hope or desire, a dwarf in the enormous clutch of pessimism.

"I don't carry your old picture," said he.

Fingers regarded him more sharply than ever. This youngster's gloomy unconcern had the voice of truth.

"You know where she is, though," stated Fingers.

With hands folded in his lap, Boldero stared vacantly at the darkest corner.

"Yes; I know," he replied. "She's put where you, nor nobody like you, will ever see her again."

Upon this the Miner plucked out his knife, bounded halfway across the room, and spread himself for another leap.

"You give 'er to me!" he roared. "You behave sensible"—he held aloft the fork of his mutilated hand, like a man making horns against the evil eye—"or I'll cut your harslet out of ye! I'll show ye what your insides look like, boy, right here on this floor!"

Boldero did not raise his head.

"See here!" Fingers the Miner suddenly turned quiet and cajoling. "No use your acting stubborn. What is there left for ye? Not a thing. Nothin' whatever." His voice resumed its old persuasive whine. "Your friend's dead and buried. He don't care. That picture, you can't never sell it on earth. They'd cheat ye. But you and me as partners,

why . . .” He laughed like one who could give away kingdoms. “You and me together, for I know where to go, can take that rag o’ paintin’ and make ourselves rich off it. Rich men!” He laughed once more. “Fifty—good Lord, a hunderd thousand dollars: you and me will halve it, square!

“Now come,” he added harshly, upon getting no response, and threw his cigar into the empty fireplace; “don’t play the fool. I’m makin’ you a fair offer. Think of it: handsome clothes; gold money in your pockets; the girls runnin’ after you; one holy time all your life, hey? You be sensible, come along, live like a rich man. If ye don’t—what? Next week, next fortni’t, whenever they happen to find ye, a carcass on the floor that some Chinaman’ll come and hold his nose at! I mean what I say. You think!”

Boldero thought. The candle still burned too far away; he could never reach it in time, knock the cupboard door shut on it, or blow it out; nor could his bare fists keep off this nightmare, this smiler with the knife. He saw the room vaguely; amid his whirl of emotion perceived in a lacklustre way that the door had drifted ajar, and that a pink flower had bloomed like a crocus in the dark opening. It signified nothing. His vision, directed inward, saw four walls furnished as he remembered them when Jimmy was alive, a warm fireside, books to read, suppers, cheerful talk. In this grimy lodging he had known a gen-

tleman and received plain counsel that contained more value than all promises, all lust of the eye and pride of life which he must now forsake.

He looked upon Fingers the Miner, who stood ready, white-faced, leaning forward; yet the figure was overshadowed by its meaning, and waited for an answer, not in human terms, but like a symbol—the champion of pessimism and despair.

“Face it.” Once more, as when the levee was melting in rain and darkness, he heard the words of his friend: “Face this thing out.”

He nodded, then rose from the window ledge. He had found the only possible weapon, and its name was nothing more than self-respect.

“If I got a soul at all,” he thought, “I owe it to Jimmy Weechurch.”

His adversary waited still.

“No,” said John Boldero. “No; I’d ruther go with Jimmy dead than you alive, you poor crumb!”

The knife swung gleaming between them. Boldero crouched; a freezing fire, the chill and flush of cowardice, ran through him from toe to scalp; but he crouched with the sharp of his hands forward, like a wrestler.

“You’ll go!” cried Fingers. “You’ll go!”

While he swayed and danced to catch an opening, over his shoulder came that pink crocus which Boldero had fancied he saw blossoming in the dark entry.

“Ha-ha! *Marne-wallah!*” rang out a laugh that ended in a grunt. “The striker ee-struck!”

A thump as of a drum resounded. Fingers the Miner toppled and fell sidewise to the floor of which he had spoken. He rolled clumsily over, sat up on elbow with a black knife-handle protruding from his left shoulder, and gazed queerly at Boldero; his eyes were altered, forgot their enmity, and grew calm, clear, intelligent.

“I said you was unlucky——” he whispered.

He rocked back and forth; then fell sidewise again and lay clasping his hands, the torn one and the sound, over the black stump in his collar bone.

Boldero saw him die; then looked elsewhere. The pink crocus was a turban. Over their dead enemy Ghanda Singh nodded at him, with a serious look and no trace of exultation.

“It the same blow,” declared the Sikh gravely, “the same blow he trying to give my brother Ram-dayal.”

XII

"WE," said the Sikh, "must leaving this."

He spoke without malice, without regret. In his dark eyes and pale bronze face gleamed only a transient emotion. Gentle, meditative, Ghanda Singh looked down at the fallen man like a hunter who had tracked his game cleverly, struck his blow in time, and was content.

"Leaving this," he repeated.

Boldero stared also, for the moment pitying what had been his tempter and his ragged angel of death. It was quite harmless now. The breath had gone forever from the nostrils of that big nose. The lanky shape lay as if sleeping, worn out by vices.

The meaning of its relaxation, the consequences, came slowly to Boldero's mind.

"You did this for me," he said, regarding the Punjabi with mingled terror and compassion. "They'll say you——" He woke suddenly from his daze. "You must get out of here. They sha'n't hang you on my account!"

The Sikh smiled, like a veteran acknowledging the generosity of youth.

"All right, sahib," he replied. "No man to hang you or me. We both very fast on our feet."

Beckoning, he turned toward the door. Boldero went to extinguish the candle; but when, before blowing it out, he took a last survey of the room, the homely old shell so bare and desecrated, a fit of grief overcame and left him holding the edge of a cupboard shelf, unmanned.

"What?" cried Ghanda Singh harshly. "That *suar* I have killed making you cry?" With a king's gesture he indicated the body on the floor. "That? A devil was living in it. It made bombs for killing women and little babies of the crowd, and ran away to laugh, to count the money of blood in its pocket. My good clean knife for this dirt of a snake? I not touching my knife again. So up your head, sahib, and come!"

Boldero nodded miserably.

"'Twasn't him altogether," he answered. "I was thinking about Jimmy."

He regained himself, and once more prepared to blow out the candle; but in the act of pursing his lips he heard a sound that made him wheel about and face the door.

Someone came mounting the stairway softly, as it were with padded feet.

They had remained talking too long, were caught like a pair of murderers. Or had they still time to darken the room and jump from the window? Boldero, exhausted, could not act upon the question.

The padded footfalls reached the landing.

"Ai-yah!" sang a comfortable voice.

Over the threshold came waddling that aged priest and cook, Leung She. Clothed in black stuff as glossy as a wet umbrella, with a broad black hat, the Chinaman entered like a Third Murderer in some old play, except that his face bore a moonish grin.

"Hi, hi!" he laughed. "Jack, boy, *ho la?*"

They did not echo his laughter. Leung She observed the fact, squinted at them briefly; then, spying the dead man on the floor and scuffing toward him, bent down for a careful look.

"He makee die," pronounced Leung She. "Huh! He no good."

With the cheerful air of one who had outspoken Bossuet at a funeral, the priest bobbed up again. He stood silent, his pointed eyes winking in a rapid course of calculation.

"You go," he advised the two others coolly.

"What about this?" Boldero glanced at the body.

"All lite. You go. I fix 'em."

"How?"

The river, it appeared, was "plenty close." Having disposed of that problem in three words, Leung

She slid one of his brown talons under the voluminous umbrella-cloth jacket, and produced a fat letter.

"Fo' you." He flipped it into Jack's hand. "Misto Weetshirt, he lite 'em; he tell me give 'em you. I guess you welly Goo' Lock. You do ewelly-sing Misto Weetshirt say; when he die he leafee you all hees money."

So far as Boldero understood this speech, it did not comfort him. He fingered the letter mournfully.

"Now you go, quick!" Like a nurse driving people from a sick room, Leung She waved his companions toward the door. "You stay heah too long tam. You foolish! Goo'-by!"

With that he blew out the candle and left them in darkness on the stairway. When they had stolen outdoors they found the neighborhood of the Black Gate deserted, a few shopwindows dimly glowing, the shabby arcade vacant.

"This way," whispered Boldero.

Through blind, ill-smelling alleys they hurried, meeting no one, and so came to the shadow mound of the levee and the bar of light from the joss-house door.

"In here."

They slipped behind a row of old flags and heavy pewter vessels that screened the altar from passing view. Boldero, reaching behind the third god among the cobwebs, recovered his paper cylinder, which he tucked inside his shirt. Then, by the bleary night

lamp, with a strange sense—even while the Sikh waited before him—of loneliness, he tore open Jimmy's letter.

It contained a second full envelope and a sheet of rather bad note paper on which was written in a crabbed uncial hand more clear and vigorous than print:

"My dear Boy: When you read this I shall be gone—without having seen you again, which vexes me to the heart, I assure you. However, death is not to be put off or denied.

"I hope you were successful; but whether or no, pray do me this added favor if possible. Won't you set out immediately for London? The journey will do you good, and this document which I enclose may perhaps enable you to travel with so-called comfort. The bank on which it is drawn is in Lombard Street. Inquire there for Lord Belsire.

"Do start at once if you can, like the good chap and honest John Boldero that you are. Should you be taking along the picture, so much the better. If not, never mind.

Your obed't servant,

"JIMMY.

"P. S. Be sure to buy plenty of handsome clothes there and everything like that. Adamson is the best tailor I know of.

“Oh, yes; take my document to the local bank for your signature.”

The document bore the superscription:

J. BOLDERO ESQ'RE
TRAVELLING

It was a double sheet of tough, crackling, greenish paper, elaborately inscribed. After much hard reading, J. Boldero, Esq're, who had never seen the like before, deciphered it as a letter of credit “to the amount of, say, five hundred pounds sterling.”

Had he been less tired, Boldero might have felt astonishment or begun to dispute the fact. As it was he turned a countenance of wonder upon the waiting Sikh.

“Jimmy,” he declared, with something like a sob, “was all right.”

Ghanda Singh smiled as one hearing a matter of course.

“You speak the truth.”

Boldero pocketed his letters.

“It's the least a feller can do,” said he. “I'm going to England.”

Again the Sikh smiled.

“Good-bye, sahib. Better we going other ways, one here, one there. So we are harder to catch. But

who can tell? The ways may be crossing again.”

He bent suddenly forward, made his outspread hand vibrate in the startling salute of the Five Rivers men, wheeled, and was gone from the joss house.

His shadowy turban—when Boldero reached the door—disappeared, marching toward the left among the dark outcast hovels that faced the embankment.

He had spoken wisely. After that killing in the upper chamber it was time they should part.

Boldero took the path toward the right.

XIII

THROUGH the heavy red-brown haze of a fine summer morning in London, a young man loitered down a thoroughfare once dear to Victorian humorists. In the days of Clive Newcome, even the immortals resorted to Wardour Street as to a good easy hunting-ground when greater game was scarce, and there bagged many a harmless joke. On this day in a more exacting year, the neighborhood made no exhibition of mirth. The young stranger, at least, was not on the broad grin as he walked along, or even gently arrided; he found Wardour Street rather grimy and blank, like a stage street when the actors have gone. He was looking for a clothes brush, and thinking meantime that this summer air in London recalled the autumnal forest fires of his native land.

A shop-window to which he came displayed three or four brushes in a general miscellany. They seemed to pass the young man's inspection, for he opened the door of the shop and went in.

It was a long dark shop, with a long bare counter. An electric bulb hanging in a green pasteboard cone

threw down upon the counter a circle of brilliancy, in which lay a heap of gray fur, coiled like the makings of a muff. As he drew near, the muff yawned and stretched out many voluptuous toes. It was a cat, which leered at him with green eyes upside down, and promptly fell asleep again.

"Good morning, sir," said a ruddy young woman, appearing from the farther twilight.

"Good morning," replied the stranger. "Fine big cat you have there, ma'am."

The woman smiled.

"Oh, yes, sir. She's considered rather handsome, is our puss."

"Maybe," ventured her admirer, "that's why she goes to sleep right in the spotlight."

The cat's mistress appeared somewhat puzzled by his terms, but caught their drift.

"Why, you see, sir, formerly it was a gas lamp, which made the boards quite warm. So puss formed the habit of sleeping there, as I might say."

The young man laughed.

"She's an English cat," he declared.

"Oh, yes, sir!" cried the woman, as if any other allegiance would be shocking.

"Yeah. She's got a historical reason for doin' something queer."

This flight of fancy proved too extravagant for the shopwoman; but, seeing it was kindly meant,

she indulged her customer with a smile and said:

“Well, sir, you’ve a quick eye to notice things. There’s not many gentlemen would see that old trick of pussy’s.”

“Oh,” rejoined the stranger, “mine ain’t the only bright eyes in this room.”

Now with such a compliment the manner is all; and this young gentleman’s was proper as could be; nothing more than his fun. Tall, active looking, he had a good plain brown face, tanned so deeply that his glances gave out light and color. She knew, besides, that the compliment was not undeserved; and, therefore, growing ruddier than ever, her face became none the worse, but sparkled with pleasure.

So Boldero bought his clothes brush and the young woman sold it with much good humor and satisfaction.

“These togs need more than brushing, though,” he said. “They need to be burnt and bought all over again.”

The cat’s owner coyly advanced an opinion that they were both tidy and becoming. Boldero thanked her, but was not convinced.

“They’re all right; only they won’t do. Maybe you can tell me. How do I go from here to find a tailor named Adamson? Ever heard of him?”

“Heard of him, sir?” cried the other gayly. “Why, Adamson is—beg pardon, sir, but Adamson has the reputation of being rather expensive.”

The young stranger did not appear discouraged.

"Hang expense; I'm aimin' high," he stated recklessly. "'What signifies a cent? Tommy, give that dog a herrin',' so long's Adamson don't sew gold fringe on my legs.'"

These seemed wild and whirling words for a respectable shop; but the woman recovered from her alarm, and presently explained in what region the great Adamson held his awful sway.

"Any cabman would know, sir," she added.

"Glad you didn't say Tube. I spent all yesterday underground, like a lost gopher. Every time I got my nose above 'twas either Shepherd's Bush or the Bank. No headway whatever."

With this mad speech, yet with a polite good morning, he went his unaccountable way. The bright black eyes he had praised watched him out of sight, their expression part bewilderment, part admiration, part something which Mr. Weller, Senior, might have called "more tenderer."

"A colonial," she thought charitably.

Meantime, unconscious that he had given her a morning's thought, Boldero hailed a cab and went rolling grandly westward through the reddish haze. He passed a number of green gardens, jailed by lofty ironwork, and was set down in a street this time which had never been accused of levity. The difference failed to impress him. All streets were the same

street, he knew, open and free to law-abiding men; all doors much the same door; so, with light foot and unbashful forehead, he mounted the stairs and entered the solemn portal of Adamson.

A Georgian calm at once enfolded him. Adamson the Tailor's shop inhabited the best room of some forgotten nabob who flourished after Warren Hastings' day, whose gorgeous carved mantel, white panels, and white pilasters maintained their specious nobility. A few long tables covered with rolls of cloth—some grave, some gay, and all tremendously neat; a row of dressing-rooms, white-paneled and white-pilastered, built along the rear wall: these alone were modern, and these fell decorously into order and made a countenance of being aged.

The establishment daunted even Boldero. He had come there only to please the shadow of a shade, to fulfill the wish of Jimmy, his departed friend.

"No place for me," he thought.

It was too late for any form of retreat. The royal Adamson himself came forward, neither smiling nor frowning, but all a mask of dread civility. Round, smooth, silver-haired, faultless, Adamson bowed, as one who had been an archbishop but had repented and chosen a more serious course of life; and yet, unable wholly to cast off the world, he walked mincingly on his toes, like Horace Walpole entering an assembly.

"Good morning, sir," he chirped.

Boldero faced him with a brave man's front. He was doing all this to honor a memory.

"Good mornin', Mr. Adamson. I want to buy four or five layouts, if you please; the best cloth you carry in your house."

Mr. Adamson indulged in a charming smile.

"Ah, very well," said he. "My son will attend you in a moment."

He turned away airily. Some underling conveyed Boldero and shut him into a dressing-room where, among mirrors and fat leather cushions, he reclined mournfully, viewing his own brown face at many angles. A taboret before him displayed in a huge brass vessel a hundred of Samsoun cigarettes, chastely decorated. He took the liberty of smoking one, for no man came to open his door.

"This ain't the place for me," he reflected. "Too high! They wouldn't make nothing short of an ascension robe."

Still, he waited and held his ground. In the next booth people were busy talking and calling measurements. Boldero forgot them while he smoked and reviewed his past; a week ago he had first sighted Dover Cliff and watched the forehead of England rise above glittering smooth Channel water; six days, four days, two days ago, he had gone to Jimmy's bank in Lombard Street, asked for Jimmy's friend, the vague Lord Belsire, and at last been told to in-

quire again on Tuesday morning. But J. Boldero, Esq're, Travelling, had ceased to put confidence in lords or princes. He was alone; he was tired; and at the present moment he had cause to feel neglected.

"Poor old Jimmy!" he sighed. "Jimmy did everything he could. He behaved like a father to me."

From beyond the white panels of the cell, voices in gentle argument floated gradually within his ken.

"Why, now really, sir," declared the voice of Adamson, "I fancy they fit you."

Then came another voice, which made Boldero's hair to rise and his blood to curdle.

"You do? I fancy you're wrong for once." It was the toneless, penetrating voice of a deaf man. "John Adamson, my Jo, John, you're mistaken. These trousers are on the tight side."

There came a soothing reply.

"I dare say you're right, sir. Possibly they are a bit on the tight side; but nowadays we're so often——"

The deaf man spoke again.

"Tush! Nowadays?" he objected clearly. "John, my legs are older than yours, but frightfully vigorous yet. I won't have them cribbed, confined, bound in. You may talk your nowadays to——"

Boldero had risen, dropped his cigarette, and stood like one in a dream. This was a voice from the

country beyond the grave. He sprang upon one of the fat leather cushions.

"Jimmy!" he called. "Oh, Jimmy!"

And then the house of Adamson beheld a thing that rocked it on its base. A young savage, leaping to the top of a white-paneled partition, hung there and stared down into the next sacred compartment.

"Good gorry!" panted the savage.

Below, among more cushions and mirrors, and thronged about by a little jury of sad men with tape measures round their necks, stood James Weechurch, half dressed, but wholly alive and well. Beside him the great Adamson recoiled in horror.

"What?" cried the likeness of Jimmy. "Is that you? The boy? Come down here!"

Boldero bestrode the wall and dropped among them, light as a jumping jack.

"Move out," said Jimmy. "We wish to talk."

The tailors went like a flock of blackbirds; Adamson, with a somnambulistic bow, closed the door; it was a moment of dread and wonder in that house of the nabob.

"I thought you were dead!" said Boldero.

Jimmy sat on a cushion, and motioned him to do the same.

"Me dead?" His eyes were quick as ever at the reading of lips. "Me dead? Why on earth should you think that?"

“They told me so.”

Boldero, not yet convinced they were wrong, began feeling for a letter cherished in his pocket. “And you wrote me this. Fingers the Miner said you was buried.”

Jimmy, in a magnificent shirt and collar, but trousers merely sketched with white basting-thread, leaned comfortably back to read his own handwriting. He was no ghost, but, beyond all doubt, his living self, though altered: his leathern face, close-cropped white hair, and twinkling eyes the same as ever, but the whole man subtly transformed and quickened. Boldero felt but could not define the change. Jimmy’s nature had been rusty and was now bright metal.

“No wonder you thought . . .! I must be losing my mind. Formerly my letters were clear,” complained Jimmy. “However, I did write that on a packing-case while the porters waited. But Leung She could have told you. It was my cousin that died. Leung She knew I was called home suddenly——”

“I never asked him,” explained Boldero. “We ducked out in a hurry. A man was killed.”

The reader glanced up quickly.

“Ah? Killed?” said he, in a guarded tone. “By——”

Boldero could be cautious.

"By happen-so," he replied; and after a moment added: "It was that there Fingers."

"Ah?" repeated his friend, watching him keenly.

"Yeah." Jack's eyes, wide, ingenuous, and very blue, seemed to misunderstand the scrutiny they met. He was not going to give anyone away, least of all Ghanda Singh, his rescuer. "Yeah. It was Fingers."

If Mr. Weechurch smiled he might have been thinking of his letter, for now he read it again before tearing it up.

"Devilish glad to see you, my boy," he declared. "What were you doing there in the next booth?"

"Waitin' to get measured."

Jimmy flung the pieces of his letter into a basket and jumped up, with a snort.

"Waiting, eh? Look here!" He pounced at the door, opened it, and cried in a voice that brought the entire force of workmen running. "Look here! John Adamson, what have we done that my friend is left waiting all day in one of your blessed loose-boxes? Tell me that, and unyoke! What does it mean?"

The wrath of Jimmy was a consuming thing, terrible even unto tailors. Adamson's marble became as wax.

"Why, really, sir!" His countenance melted into the uneasy grins of an old rogue who knew his master's way. "My memory is no longer what it was,

sir. Pardon me. I failed to recognize—dear me!—one of your friends——”

Jimmy cut short his apology by thrusting Boldero at him.

“Take that young man,” he cried, “and exercise your art upon him. One of my friends? He’s my child, my great-godson, and the apple of my eye. Do your worst, and kindly be quick about it, John, for we’re going into the country as soon as possible.”

A moment later Boldero, once more in his own compartment, found himself the object and centre of great doings. Tailors ran in and out, tailors crouched at his feet, tailors encircled him, held up his arms, murmured deprecation in his ears, took his altitude, wrote him down in Domesday Book. He enjoyed it immensely; he would have enjoyed anything, he could have embraced them all; for was not his idol back on its throne, his world a place of brightness and music, now that Jimmy had returned from the shades?

Through the open door he saw his old friend, completely dressed, very brisk and cheerful, watching the commotion.

“Don’t be too fastidious. We need time for lunch, and we’ll have a long afternoon.”

Boldero was reminded of a duty.

“I was to go to see your friend Lord What’s-name

this afternoon," he said. "How about it now, Jimmy?"

"Lord who?"

"Lord Belsire."

"Damn it, that's me!" said Jimmy peevishly. "Hurry them up!" Then he began to laugh. "Jack, you're the picture, in there, of Lemuel Gulliver being measured by trigonometry in Lilliput.—I'm devilish glad to see you, boy!"

XIV

ON A hot summer evening, at the close of the happiest yet most troubled week in his life, Boldero came walking home with Jimmy through a green lane sunken between hawthorns and pollard elms. Flowers—wild thyme, mauve gypsy rose, and yellow toad-flax—covered the bank on either hand; little movements of wayside creatures frightened by the two men's advancing shadows, fluttered the hedgerow now and again before them; above, where sea breeze cooled the hilltop air, an English skylark twinkled like a black star and filled the sunset light with an accompanying glory of song.

"Hold on!" said Boldero, pausing at the gate of a field to stare aloft and listen.

"Wish I could hear him," growled Jimmy. "Used to do. Skylarking! The chap who coined that word, by George, was a poet good as any, and saw the contrast of earth and heaven. We plod while our friend sings. I envy you. Confound these dead ears of mine; all they can do is remember what they're missing!"

Through the barred gap in the hawthorn beside them appeared a great bosom of sunlit turf, crowded with sheep—some reddled, others earmarked in blue. A young ram feeding before a scarlet golf flag seemed to bear it over his shoulder like an *Agnus Dei*. Ewes bleated for their lost lambs, or, having found them, submitted to the hunger of brown fleece-mops that burrowed underneath and waggled. A peaceful foreground, the flock continued its wandering edge into a valley, beyond which rose hill after broad hill painted in squares of green crops and of pinkish fallow. Intervening ridges and the eastern sky-line bore clumps of darker and older growth—here a wood; there cottage roofs whose thatch made billows round a Norman church tower.

“ ‘Can’t never ’ear the ’um of zummer bees,’ ” mourned the deaf man.

Boldero found a different meaning in the prospect.

“And think—all this,” he cried, “belongs to you! Far as we can see.”

Jimmy, laying one hand on the youngster’s arm, made a weary grimace.

“What profit in thinking so, my dear boy?” said he. “Yes, I’m legal owner of this landscape; but lawyer’s parchments and pothooks mean very little—transient affairs. They pretend I own two or three more landscapes, fair and smiling as this, in other parts of the country. What then? Can they make

a man happy? No; nor unhappy, either. Did you ever see the remarkable postage stamp issued by a great dominion that proclaimed, 'We Hold a Vaster Empire Than Has Been'? Like Corsica Boswell's hatband; or like wearing a sandwich board—"I'm the richest damned idiot on earth!" Such views, at my age, lose their inflation. Ownership? Labor and sorrow, soon cut off, and we fly away. The bird up there is one of my tenants; I own his nest on the ground, think of that; and yet he won't sing loud enough for landlord to hear. Do you envy me, Jack? Now as you are a Roman, tell me true."

Boldero watched a flight of black motes—jackdaws or rooks—hovering to settle and vanish in the square tower far away.

"You always think right straight," he answered. "My fool notions kind of make me ashamed."

The old man laughed and turned from the gate. They walked on, a pair of knickerbockered trampers homeward bound, comfortably tired, glowing with twenty miles of fresh air and exercise.

"Fond of my own place, just the same," growled Jimmy, as they topped the hill and saw their lane reach downward into a valley of streaming sun and shadow. Midway on the slope an avenue of huge beeches led westerly, widening to become a grove in which Lord Belsire's favorite farm, Lomansworthy, reared a silhouette of old chimneys and gables. De-

spite his late renunciation, Jimmy's face brightened with a look of something very close akin to pride.

"One does belong to certain places," he said. "Only, we have to leave all this." His eyes rested affectionately on the grove and black roofs, the shining fields beyond, and the little river which in the valley bottom reflected a drooping elm, the sky, and a strip of fiery cloud. "It's not so bad," mused Jimmy. "As the thief said, going to be hung, when he drank St. Giles's bowl, 'Twould be good if a man might stay by it!'"

They turned into the avenue of mighty beeches and went on. It was a tunnel of green and gold, upheld by giant boles against the sunset. Down this tunnel rode a man to meet them—a lean, swarthy man in whipcord, mounted on a beautiful chestnut mare, who came dancing sidelong, her haunches outlined with a play of light. The man wore a pink turban and sat grinning.

"How goes it, Ghanda Singh?" called Jimmy.

"She needs riding," the Sikh reported. While he spoke the mare took him a pirouette. "Ho, child! A woman with nothing to do."

"Jack will teach her behavior to-morrow," began Belsire.

But the chestnut was gone flying toward the lane, her rider glancing back with a joyful flash of teeth.

"Who killed Fingers the Miner?" asked Lord

Belsire, as if propounding a Cock Robin riddle.

"I never said anyone killed him," replied Boldero.

Several days ago, in the stables of Lomansworthy, he had met Ghanda Singh, looking like a man born and reared there among horses. They had talked much, but not of that slaying in the upper chamber.

"I told you Fingers got it by happen-so."

"Humph! I fear," retorted James Weechurch dryly, "you wish to soak up merit belonging to my old and faithful follower."

Boldero took the imputation without a word; then, chancing to look at his companion, knew by the smile that it was irony. Lord Belsire meant anything but displeasure.

They crossed the lawn and entered the gray stone house. A boar's head snarled from above the door. On a table, under a stand of riding-crops where they hung their headgear, lay a dozen newspapers over-lapped with names displayed in a row. Jimmy glanced at them as he passed.

"Bad news from the continent." He had said this a dozen times lately.

"Ghanda Singh was a prophet," replied Boldero. "War's comin'."

"Very like."

They parted, to meet again at dinner. In a great stone hall, lighted by many candles and a fire, though its windows were open on a terrace of bright turf and

laurels, they ate what seemed, after their exercise, the best of many capital meals. At each man's elbow stood a tall glass of Irish whisky and soda that, as Boldero observed, would make a cat speak; yet they ate in silence, for the most part, or made mention briefly of things they had admired during the day's walk.

"Adamson cut you pretty well," declared Jimmy, at dessert.

Boldero felt surprise and pleasure. He had forgotten his grand evening clothes; everything always fitted him, or soon grew familiar.

"I got 'em to please you."

"When you thought I was dead," his host added, musing.

A serious elderly man watched them from before the broad fireplace.

"I want to see that Chinese painting again," said Jimmy, turning to him. "Go fetch it, Faithorne; and have the coffee in."

The serious elderly man withdrew, but soon returned. Jimmy unrolled among his candles and weighted flat, with a pair of silver basins, the landscape created by a queen when the dust of antiquity was alive, moving, recording thoughts for another age to recognize. Boldero came round the dinner table and leaned over his friend's chair. Once more the homely picture of Three Cows performed its magic.

There lay the mountain peaks under the dawn, ghostly, shimmering, unchanged even by time, but quietly foretelling its power in an allegory of the beasts that perish.

"Well nigh perfect," said Jimmy. "A wonder!" He rolled it together carefully. "Loot," he continued. "Loot. I'll restore it into proper hands, to the family that owns it rightfully. By the Five Hundred Jinns, what a lovely old thing. Here; lock it up again, Faithorne, please."

He drank his coffee and sat pondering.

"I've collected many pieces roundabout the world, Jack, but this piece marks high water. Number One in my lot. Thanks to you."

"And thanks to little Ramdayal," said Boldero.

"And to Ramdayal. But he's provided for; I've done nothing for you. Let's move outdoors."

Through a French window they gained the terrace, where barn swallows flew, darting, swerving, redoubling a hundred vagaries before the last glow of summer day should fail into twilight. By Jimmy's side Boldero paced a grassy level, fresh-mown, cool-scented, which overlooked a long meadow slope and the tiny English river. Wandering through verdure below, the stream showed as a dark green glaze, an evening pool where swans floated asleep, like cakes of foam or ice drifting under a nightfall of elm and willow shade.

"Bad news from the continent," repeated Jimmy for the last time.

"Yeah. Sure! It's bad," assented Boldero.

Each man knew the other had been thinking of little else all day. They walked a few turns without speaking. The sallow green light covering the hills became gradually musical with bells from church tower and church tower, as villages in the distance rang their evening chimes. All the countryside faded little by little into an umber dusk and a harmony of sweet bells.

"If war should spoil it!" Jimmy was talking to himself. "I sometimes think this earth has been converted to the devil, peopled with Darwin apes that invent new ways of murdering. You, my boy, are a comfort. I'm a lonely old man without children."

"You can't call me inventive, anyway," Boldero answered. "My brains work awful slow."

There was light enough still for the reading of lips and hearts.

"It's rather like finding a son," declared Lord Belsire. "Let us talk about your future. Come; tell me what I can best do for you, Jack?"

The bells chimed to one another from their hills, but Boldero hearkened for something else—for the right answer to his inward questioning.

"All I want's your advice."

The barn swallows had gone; the bats begun to tumble above high clusters of rhododendron.

"I do a lot more thinkin' than you'd suspect, Jimmy," he said. "If this here war comes I'd kind of like, maybe, to go fight on the French side. My mother was French. I spoke it before I learnt English. No; I don't mean like to. That ain't the word. Wish I wasn't so cussed ignorant, or I could tell you what I do mean."

Jimmy stopped midway on the terrace, drew out a cigar, and handled without lighting it.

"Ah!" said he. "Must I find you only to lose you?"

Hooking their arms together, Boldero led him on, up and down the sweet-smelling lawn.

"You been like a father. Now tell me," he urged. "They say France will feel the go-off hardest. Don't you think I ought to be there?"

Lord Belsire was watching his swans adrift in the river.

"If you feel so," he admitted, "I'm not the fellow to stop you."

The bell-ringing ceased; hill and valley grew silent; the darkness deepened.

"My brains work slow," resumed Boldero. "I figger it this fashion: There's a crowd of fire bugs trying to burn the world up."

"Very like," said Jimmy.

"I've thought about 'em all this week. Seemed

kind of foolish, in a way, my settin' up to do anything. You really suppose it would be . . . sensible?"

"Very!" cried the owner of Lomansworthy, with an odd, abrupt decision. "My advice is not worth much. I've nothing but money, you know. Too old; too deaf. But I'd say—very sensible!"

They smiled at each other.

"Glad you back me," said Boldero; "for that's how I figgered, anyway. I expect they'll need all hands. A lot of fire bugs trying to burn it up. Got to go put 'em out."

From the windows of the farmhouse candlelight began to streak the lawn; young fretful owls went squalling through the beechwood avenue; river, elms, and sleeping swans blended in a darkness that might have been the foundation of serenity.

"Yeah! Got to go!"

And then, like history, a fragment of a child's rhyme repeated itself,—the words and the wisdom of Mother Goose:

"To put 'em out's the only way," said honest John Boldero.

THE END

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